

Boroughbred Behavior Resources



Issue: Leash Manners

For many families, it is important to have a dog that can walk calmly beside you when you are walking on leash. Loose-leash walking can take some time to teach but it's well worth the effort! Dogs pull on walks because they have learned that pulling gets them where they want to go, so in order to teach a dog to walk on a loose leash you need to help them learn that keeping a loose leash is more rewarding than pulling.

Dogs live in a smell-driven world, so the main enjoyment of a walk comes in getting to smell lots of different things. Walks should be pleasurable for dogs, rather than a forced march on a tight leash where they are prevented from investigating.

Here are some steps to take in order to teach your dog to do this:

- Teach your dog to pay attention to you while walking. This can be done by giving your dog a treat for looking at you. Say "Look," and then make excited, happy noises. When your dog looks, give a treat. Do this often, whether on a walk or not, so that your dog starts looking at you more often. Also do this when you walk by other dogs or other distractions.
- Avoid going where your dog pulls you. Every time your dog pulls and gets to the place they want to go, that behavior is reinforced. When your dog pulls, stop walking and wait for your dog to return to your side before continuing forward motion, or turn and walk in the other direction. This is especially important when taking your dog somewhere he walks to go, like the park, pet store, or other fun places. It is vital to not only stop the behavior you don't want (pulling) but also to reward the behavior you do (returning to your side). So as soon as the dog turns to you and/or starts to move toward you, and you feel slack on the leash, move immediately toward the place the dog was initially pulling toward. Over time, this will teach your dog that they can get where they want to go by keeping the leash loose and walking alongside you.
- Avoid letting your dog approach a dog or person by pulling towards them. Just like the above instruction, stop moving when your dog pulls, but as soon as they move back toward you, let them know they can "Say Hello!" and allow them to greet the person or dog. If your dog continues pulling toward the other dog or a person, walk away in the opposite direction.
- While you do want to let your dog sniff on walks (it is important to give your dog time to work his their mind by allowing them to sniff), you do not want them to get to scents by pulling you. Call your dog to check in and look at you, and if they do you can tell them to "Go sniff" and let them have some time to sniff around.
- Make sure to bring lots of really good treats on walks (chicken, hot dogs, cheese, etc.) as you are competing for your dog's attention with all the distractions around you so your treats must be better than these distractions. Give treats often on the walk to reward your dog for being near your side or looking towards you. It is important to be attentive to your dog on the walk and make sure they get the opportunity to sniff lots of things and to explore where they want – as long as they do it without pulling.

Leash Biting

Some dogs grab the leash in their mouth while walking. This is a common behavior in a shelter environment where dogs are frequently bored and looking for new activities. If “leash biting” is checked on your newly-adopted dog’s behavior assessment, it means that they have taken to biting the leash while they are being brought out for walks. As with all things, there are varying levels of intensity to this behavior, and that should be described on the evaluation. Some dogs’ bodies remain loose and wiggly and they just happen to enjoy having the leash in their mouth; others become more aroused and begin to pull hard and shake their heads, risking biting through the leash or possibly inadvertently biting hands that are trying to take the leash out of their mouth.

Leash biting behavior seen in the care center will not necessarily be seen once the dog is in their new home. However, if it does and if that is problematic, here are some steps you can take to work the behavior:

- Walk your dog with a toy. Some dogs will be happy to carry a toy in their mouths instead of the leash. Try using a ball or stuffed squeaky to see if there is a type of toy your dog likes best.
- If your dog is not interested in carrying a toy, work on teaching your dog to look at you in the manner described above. While walking, you can call your dog to look at you and frequently give them treats to keep them engaged while walking. If they do grab the leash during the walk, see if you can trade them for a treat. It is important to use high value treats for this (i.e. chicken, cheese, hot dogs).
- Practice walking your dog around your home on leash. If they grab the leash despite working with treats or toys, drop the leash and walk out of the room. Avoid playing tug with the leash with your dog.
- Teach your dog a “Drop” cue. See our “Trading Up” flyer for the steps to teach this cue.

If you need more help:

Seek out a consultation with a professional, certified behaviorist or a certified dog trainer.

Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers: <http://www.ccpdt.org>

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists: <http://corecaab.org>