



# The Underdog Training "So Your Dog" Series, Topic Four So Your Dog- Pulls on the Lead

Copyright 2012

We have all had those familiar walks. The walk that turns into a run, or leaves you with a sore shoulder at the conclusion of what was supposed to be a fun outing! Do you put off walking your dog because they pull on the lead? Do you find yourself driving to off lead areas to exercise your dog instead of enjoying a pleasant walk around your neighbourhood? Get started teaching your dog to walk well on lead- and start to enjoy your mutual exercise once again!

## Why do dogs pull on the lead?

- To get to where they want to go! Many dogs have learned that the fastest way to get to their favourite places is to pull on the lead.
- The dog becomes over excited when in the presence of other dogs or people.
- The dog has not been trained to walk nicely on the lead without distractions first. The dog is too distracted when out and about to learn effectively and their behaviour deteriorates further.
- The dog is not on the most effective piece of training equipment to help them learn the loose lead walking skill
- The dog is handled inconsistently
- The dog is handled by a number of different people who all train the dog differently
- The dog does not have any reward history for walking well on lead and has plenty of reward history for pulling on the lead
- The dog is anxious, reactive or aggressive. In these cases professional assistance is required.

## How to Stop the Dog Pulling on the Lead

- **Desensitise your dog** to their walking collar/ harness and lead. If your dog becomes extremely excited whenever they see or hear their lead, this will hinder your teaching of their loose lead walking (LLW). Move the lead around the house many times throughout the day without taking your dog for a walk each time. You will find your dogs level of excitement reduces. The more excited your dog is, the harder it is for them to process information and learn new skills.
- **Practice walking at home.** Yes that's right- practicing walking at home is the perfect way to start to teach your dog to walk well. Whenever a new skill is taught we like to start with low levels of distraction. Only once the dog can perform the behaviour without distraction do we start to gradually increase the difficulty. Can your dog loose lead walk from your back door to your front door? Around your back or front yard? If the answer is no, they are unlikely to be able to walk well on the street or at the park.
- **Loosen your grip!** Sometimes in our effort to teach the dog to walk well, WE are the ones that put tension on the lead and give the dog something to pull against. Give the dog full length of the leash- Heel is a separate exercise that we can teach once the dog can walk well with the full length of the lead available to them.
- **Reward, Reward, Reward!!** Have a good supply of small food rewards or your dogs kibble to use on your dogs walks. You may want to reduce their meals in the short term to prevent weight gain. Does your dog play with toys? Take a toy along that you can play tug of war with for those times when your dog ignores an exciting distraction to instead walk politely with you. Make it worth their while!!
- **Use life rewards-** When your dog wants to sniff a favourite tree, greet a person or dog, insist that they are walking on a loose lead before they do so. Every reward they receive for walking well will help to cement this new behaviour and it will quickly become habit, just as pulling on the lead had become habit!
- **Encourage the dog** to walk on one side of your body by only providing rewards in that area. Use your left hand to place a food reward on the left side of your body. Wait for the dog to return to the area for the reward- this becomes the reward zone. Be patient- they don't know the reward is there so it may take them a moment to realise what you are doing.
- **Stop and be stationary** before your dog puts tension on the lead. As soon as you can see the loop in your lead is disappearing (i.e. - the dog is about to pull) STOP abruptly. Do not move forward again until the dog is back in your reward zone.
- **Change direction-** walking straight lines tends to encourage pulling as the dog sets their sight on something in the distance. Changes of direction and zig zag type movements encourage the dog to check in with you as they never know which way you're going to turn. Never be afraid to do a complete 180 when walking to help get your dogs attention.
- **Different family members handling differently?** All the family should attend training so that they can consistently apply the same techniques to teach the dog to walk well. However, if someone in the family runs with the dog or for some reason cannot or will not carry out the training but still wishes to walk the dog- put a regular harness on the dog on these occasions while the dog is engaged in the process of learning LLW. The dog will learn that when the harness is on- they may run or pull but when their training collar is on- they must walk well. Once the dog is consistently walking well- the harness may no longer be required. This is a better option than being inconsistent with the dog from day to day
- **Be Consistent!** Teaching a dog to LLW is like giving up smoking- one drag and you're back to the beginning again! Whether moving towards their favourite dog friend or an interesting smell- if they attempt to pull STOP and don't move forward until the lead is loose.
- **Choose the right training equipment** to help your dogs training. Have you considered a Sensible (front attaching) Harness or martingale collar? Choosing the right training equipment is difficult with so many available options- it's important to choose something you can easily learn to use as well as something that suits your dog.
- **Go to training!** The best way to learn how to teach your dog the skill of LLW is to get some professional help. Group or private training can help to teach you the techniques needed as well as choose the best equipment for you and your dog.

**The information provided in the So Your Dog Series is general in nature. We recommend seeing a qualified dog trainer and having a veterinary examination completed for the best results in resolving your dogs problems. For further information or training options, go to [www.underdogtraining.com.au](http://www.underdogtraining.com.au)**