



Animal Alliances, LLC
Companion Animal Behavior Services

Pulling

Does your dog practically pull your arm off when you take him for a walk? Has it become so unpleasant that you no longer want to walk him? Well, you're not alone. Many dogs that have never been taught to walk on a loose leash pull their owners down the street. This is because dogs have what we call "opposition reflex", which means they pull against pressure. When a dog feels pressure on the front of his throat from his collar, he actually pulls against it. This is why choke collars only make the problem worse. The tighter the collar gets, the more he will pull - it's a vicious cycle. In addition, choke chain collars and prong or pinch collars are painful and can actually damage your dog's trachea. There is no need to hurt your dog because he is doing what comes naturally.

The best method to teach your dog to stop pulling is to "become a tree" when he pulls. Start walking, and whenever the leash becomes tight, you simply stop, plant yourself like a tree, and don't say a word. Your dog will eventually look back at you as if to say, "hey, why aren't we moving?". When he does this he will most likely move slightly toward you, loosening the leash. When there is slack in the leash, start walking again. He will eventually learn that when he feels tension on the leash, he doesn't go anywhere, but when the leash is slack he is allowed to walk.

In addition to stopping when your dog pulls on the leash, you need to reward him when he DOESN'T pull. This is a perfect place to use your clicker. When he is walking with a slack leash - randomly "click" the clicker - marking the loose leash walking. When he hears the click he will most likely come back to you for the reward. Between these two things - stopping when he pulls and only moving forward again when he slackens the leash and then rewarding the loose leash with a click and treat your dog will learn how to walk properly.

Some dogs need a little extra help learning not to pull on the leash. Perhaps he is particularly strong or he has spent years pulling so it has become a bad habit. For these dogs, a head halter can help. There are several different kinds of canine head halters (Gentle Leader, Halti, Snoot Loop, Comfort Trainer) and they work on the same basic principle - if you control the head of an animal, you control the entire body. The canine head halters were designed after the horse halters - sort of like power steering for the animal. When a dog is wearing a head halter he is discouraged from pulling because as he does, his head is brought around towards you, making it difficult for him to pull you down the street. Head halters usually require some desensitization to help your dog get used to the feel of something on his face. This process usually involves a few days of putting it on and off several times - increasing the amount of time it stays on each time. To help the process along, offering extra special treats every time its put on will help.

Another wonderful tool to help the pulling dog are the front-clasping body harnesses (the Easy Walker and the Sensible or Sensation Harnesses). These harnesses are designed so that the leash comes out from the chest instead of the back. So when the dog pulls forward - his entire front half moves around to the side, making it difficult to continue any forward movement.