

## **Loose Lead Walking**

There are several methods that can produce the same results. The following notes describe a process by which a loose lead can be achieved using reward.

Essential items are, rewards, a collar and a short leash. The exercise will be taught on a short leash to begin with, as anyone with a pulling dog can verify, within the space of just a six foot length of lead, the momentum that can be built up is enough to pull the owner over. There is also less opportunity to find alternative distractions on such a restricted scale.

Begin in a distraction free area. Begin walking in a straight line, saying nothing. Should the dog pull, and he will. Stand still. The dog will make greater efforts to continue, but there will come a time when he may look back, step back or turn around. This is the first criteria for reward / reinforcement and should be rewarded. If the treat is ignored verbal praise would suffice, and quite common because the continued forward movement can be used as the reinforcer.

Once the behaviour has been performed consistently and the dog has worked out that pulling means all movement forward STOPS!...you can then heighten the criteria for reward and expect a little more self control. (That is a dog that was initially rewarded for looking back should now be expected to step back before being rewarded, this is a large effort and should earn a jackpot).

This process of achieving a reliable response for achievable criteria for reward is continued until an acceptable walking position on a loose lead is achieved. At this stage the dog's environment can be changed and the loose-lead walking can be practiced in the presence of distractions.

Beginning at a distance that the dog can tolerate is the correct way to introduce the exercise. Now that a sensible walking position and loose lead are the criteria for reward, it would be unfair and unrealistic to expect the dog to now perform with just a few paces of a distraction such as another dog. If the dog cannot achieve the same response at 20 paces then begin at 30 paces away from a distraction. Once this is reliable move a little closer.

As long as you work at the dog's rate of learning and tolerance level then progress should continue, because the correct behaviour will be consistently being reinforced. The dog will make indications as to what his tolerance level is, by his behaviour on the lead. Should you find that the behaviour regresses consistently as you move progressively closer, then you may want to consider using a reward of increased value.

Practice the loose lead walking in a whole variety of environments, teaching the dog to generalize the response. Have the dog practice the loose lead walking with a variety of distractions, i.e. well behaved dogs, not so well behaved, approaching toy's lying on the floor, approach family across a field or familiar faces down the street. Use various reinforcers, such as the attention from the people, if the approach was on a consistent loose lead, toys and various food treats. Approach the dog's favourite tree Or lamppost and once again should the lead remain loose, then click and reward him with a sniff and cock of his leg at the post.

### Trouble-shooting

*What if your dog doesn't appear to be maintaining a loose lead?*

- Don't push the dog too far too soon
- Work at the dog's learning rate
- When introducing distractions, begin with one which is mild on the dog scale
- Increase the reward
- Observe your dog closely and accept and reward effort that is offered no matter how small
- Change the reward
- Change the environment
- Change direction by turning in towards the dog
- Try introducing a word that will indicate to the dog that the previous effort was wrong. The word " WRONG " can be used, and to good effect, if used in a NORMAL tone of voice, whilst simultaneously turning away from the distraction you are approaching. This in the dogs mind is a form of punishment because the reward has been removed, without the need for any physical corrective methods being necessary. Re-approach the distraction giving the dog another opportunity.