

Walking with Your Dog

What does the behavior look like?

An enjoyable walk with a dog will look different for each dog/handler team. It will also look different depending on the location and circumstances of that particular walk. For example, you might be happy if your arm isn't dislocated during a neighborhood jaunt, but in a crowded area you might be very pleased if your dog can heel through the distractions without missing a beat.

Why should we learn it?

Connection with our dogs is at the root of a pleasant walk and loss of that connection often creates unpleasant experiences.

While walking our dog is a mandatory part of living with a dog, often times what humans want and what dogs want from a walk can be in conflict. It need not be that way, if we take a closer look at the whole business of walking with our dogs and what foundation skills might be needed.

Plan for a Successful Walk:

Before we get into techniques for walking your dog, it's important to do a bit of homework first.

- **Determine if the environment is good** for your puppy or untrained dog. Assessing the environment means you can slow down when needed and let the dog understand the environment, rather than being constantly told to leave it alone.
- **Respond appropriately to other dogs.** It is very poor canine greeting to have one dog frontally approach another dog. Gregarious dogs and shy dogs need to learn a frontal approach is something you will not tolerate. Lateral movement (crossing the street—going up a driveway—lots of stopping) is a better way to walk. It takes a lot of familiarization, practice and learning to ignore such dogs. If your dog bombards other dogs, step aside and do not contribute to the problem.
- **Walk at the right speed for you and your dog.** Not all old dogs walk slowly! Any training that requires a dog to move at an unnatural pace is going to cause stress. Dogs are not good at forced consistent pacing, especially on hard pavement. When there is a stride difference between us and our dogs, our dogs should not be made to suffer and match our pace all of the time. Depending on the dog, take a break—stop-sniff-jog-zig zag your pattern and stroll.
- **Take some time to practice** NOT yanking back on the lead and keep it short when needed. Carry your arms in a relaxed fashion and keep that lead secure in your hand.
- **Set a boundary and keep it!** There is a significant yet subtle difference between the dog pulling you and you pulling the dog. The more the dog is pulled the more he is likely to pull. This is triggered by the opposition reflex (movement against pressure) which is triggered by the leash pressure. You set a boundary – STOP – angle your body away from your dog and JUST STAND STILL. Be a little elastic to avoid a sudden jerk. This boundary tells your dog we will go no further in that direction.
- **Reconnect and join up to continue!** As the dog completes his investigation, he will look to you and likely move toward you so be prepared to move. Look for the dog to **reconnect** with you and **join** your walk. You can make this moment more tangible by rewarding with food at your side while in motion.



Training Pre-Requisite: Sit at Your Side

[This behavior is a pre-requisite for all following behaviors]

What does the behavior look like?

You have probably taught your dog how to sit while he is in front of you looking at your face. (Please review our **Sit** handout for the basic behavior first.)

We also need to teach him how to sit at your side. Roughly, the dog should be on either your left or right side with his shoulder parallel to your hip.

Why should we learn it?

At first glance, having your dog learn how to sit at your side, rather than directly in front of you seems to have little to do with polite walking. However, it is a critical skill for both dog and handler to learn. The entire premise of changing a behavior (i.e. pulling on leash) is to teach the dog an acceptable behavior in its stead (acceptable alternative behavior). In this case, having your dog at your side when you walk is a very nice behavior.

You can teach your dog one particular side where you prefer that he walk or you can eventually teach both sides. If you plan on doing Agility training, we recommend teaching your dog to work off either side of your body. This example will teach a left side sit (reverse the instructions for the right side) with the dog parallel to your body, his shoulder aligned with your hip.

Training Sit at Your Side:

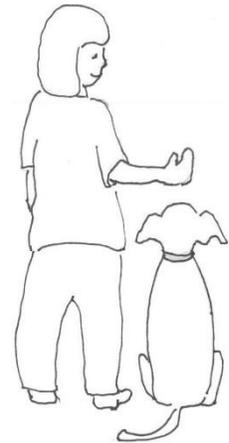
Be kind to your dog and practice Step One (the handler luring motion) before you try it with your dog.

Step One: Training the Handler

1. **Base Position:** Shoulders should be square and facing forward. Both feet are facing forward. Your left hand should be at your side.
2. **Practice Leg Movement:** Assuming a left side sit, keep your right foot planted and step straight back with your left leg. Shoulders should remain more or less square and facing forward and both feet are facing forward. Return to base position by moving left foot forward.
3. **Add Hand Movement:** Add your left hand moving back to lure imaginary dog while simultaneously stepping back with the left leg. Lure your imaginary dog back as far as your hand can comfortably go. Return to base position by simultaneously moving left foot forward and returning your left hand to your side.
4. **Add the "Sit" Cue:**
 - a. Move your left hand back to lure imaginary dog while simultaneously stepping back with the left leg.
 - b. Return to base position by moving left foot forward and your left hand to your side. As you move back into base position, continue to lure your imaginary dog and bring your left hand up to **cue the dog to "Sit"** at your side.
 - c. Note: Begin the "Sit" lure with your hand on the left side of your body, even with your hip, rather than in front of your body.
5. Repeat a few times until you are fluid without the dog.

Step Two: Training with your Dog

1. **Preparation:** You should have a lure of sufficient size and softness to handle some nibbles from your dog. The dog should be roughly in front of and facing you. He doesn't have to be in any particular position. In fact, it may be better if he isn't in a sit since some dogs try to maintain their sit.
2. **Lure dog to the back:** While maintaining good lure form (dog nose to treat), lure the dog straight back while simultaneously stepping back with your left leg and extending your left hand back as far as possible. Give the dog the treat in this position (your left leg/hand extended back and dog lured well behind you. He should be parallel and facing the opposite direction of your body). Repeat 2 – 3 times or until dog is smoothly following the lure.
3. **Add the step forward/sit combination:** Lure the dog back as in step 2. Keeping the dog's nose to the lure as you step back to base position. This turns the dog left (or in towards you) and brings the dog up parallel to your side. Lift your hand to give the "Sit" cue. Ensure that the reward comes from the hand closest to the dog.
4. The dog should sit until released; however, many won't be able to do this the first time around.



Troubleshooting:

- A dog who is maintaining his sit is actually trying very hard to understand what you want. Help him by getting him out of the sit and moving before you ask for the luring behavior.
- You swing your arm wide to the left rather than straight back.
- You step out and to the left rather than straight back.
- You move your right foot too.
- Incorrect luring! Nose to lure contact is broken and may be moving too fast.
- When returning to base position, you cue the "Sit" too late (i.e. when your hand passes your side). This pulls the dog too far forward and he will try to move to your front to see your face.
- Rewarding out of the wrong hand (pulls dog out of position).
- Behavior (of you and your dog) will be sloppy at first, so practice!

Training Polite Walking: There are several methods for teaching your dog to walk politely.

Attention Walking:

1. Start off with the dog in front of you and walk backwards several steps, ensuring that you have your dog's attention using your voice and a lure.
2. After several steps of walking backwards, turn **clockwise** 180 degrees and continue in the same direction, but now facing forward. This puts the dog on your left side.
3. After no more than a couple of steps, lure your dog with the soft food in the hand nearest the dog. Come to a slow stop and lure your dog into a "Sit" at your side.
4. When walking backwards, be very engaging with your dog. Repeat several times.
5. After a few days of practice, start adding more forward steps before you ask for the side sit.
6. If you lose your dog's absolute attention when walking forward, make a rapid 90 degree turn to the right and quickly move away from him. Your dog should notice your abrupt departure and turn his head (mark this behavior) and try to catch up (deliver the reward when he arrives at your side). You are marking his attention and rewarding both attention and the desired position at your side.

Target Walking:

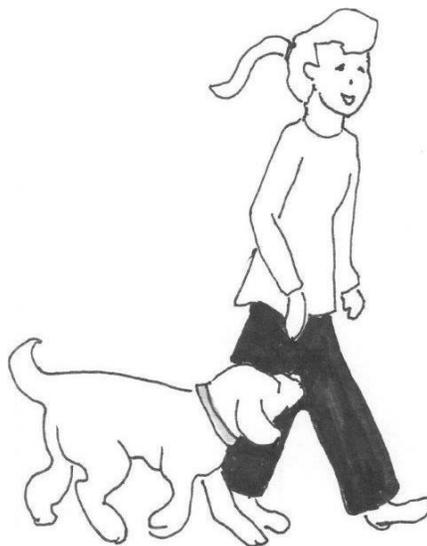
1. The premise of target walking is that pulling on the leash to get somewhere or something does not result in success. This is an example of using the environment to reward the dog.
2. Start with your dog in a sit at your left side.
3. Begin walking towards a favorite place/person/food. Choose something that stimulates your dog to pull on his leash.
4. As soon as your dog starts pulling,
 - a. Gently stop your forward motion (i.e. pulling results in loss of ability to move closer to the desired place) OR
 - b. Gently stop your forward motion and walk backwards (i.e. pulling results in moving FURTHER away from the desired place)
5. Once your dog has refocused on you, move him back into side sit (desired position). Once in the correct position, resume movement towards the desired place or object.
6. Plan to start far away, and expect that it will take some time to get there.
7. Upon arrival at the desired place or object, in a calm manner you should verbally (& physically, if appropriate) release the dog to investigate the desired place/item (i.e. reward).
8. Through this gentle communication, you are developing the ability to communicate with your dog with subtle collar cues. If you practice this consistently, pressure on the leash will automatically cause your dog to return to your side to ensure continued forward motion.

Advanced Training and Application:

Precision Heeling:

What does the behavior look like?

Heel means the dog stays by your left (or right side if you decide) and his nose does not extend beyond the plane of your body. Heeling is a precise and somewhat complicated behavior that is best learned with a qualified dog training instructor.



Why should we learn it?

Teaching a dog to heel is a rewarding process and a valuable behavior to be able to cue when walking through crowds, tight spaces and narrow sidewalks. It is a behavior a dog should not be required to perform for long periods of time because it's a difficult body position for the dog to maintain.

Training:

One Step Heel: Why one step? Most dogs do not know how to heel right away. Breaking the behavior down to its smaller pieces helps the dog learn the "walking beside me" behavior more precisely.

Please note that the below instructions apply to a left heel. Reverse instructions for right heel. When practicing the exercises below, start by taking only one step.

Forward Motion:

1. With leash dragging, assume the base position with both hands held calmly at the belt line. Have food rewards in the hand away from the dog. This is your food reservoir from which you pull the food rewards that will be placed on the left side of your body. Note that the food will be delivered to the dog with your left hand.
2. With the dog sitting on your left side, take a step away to the right.
 - a. Cue the dog "Heel" or "Let's Go" to let him know he can get out of his sit.
 - b. Mark ANY movement your dog makes as if to follow you. This could be a shoulder movement or a paw lifting to follow you.
 - c. Reward with your left hand by placing the reward at your pants seam on the side the dog is on.
 - d. After delivering the reward, return to base position.
 - e. Take another step until your dog gets the idea that following you makes that hand drop and a treat appears.
3. After a circle, start stepping out into a **wedding march**.
4. Walk several steps, mark and reward at your pants' seam for your dog meeting that location.

Turns:

Training the Handler

1. Envision yourself standing on a dinner plate.
2. Make four quarter turns to the left (full circle left) without feet leaving dinner plate.
3. Make four discrete quarter turns to the right (full circle right) without feet leaving dinner plate.
4. You are teaching your dog how to read your body for instructions, so it is important that you are consistent. Your body motion is a non-verbal communication in heeling. You will use this technique when teaching your dog the right and left turns (pivots) below.



Right Turn (Pivot): A right pivot is a quarter (90 degree) turn to the right.

1. Begin with the dog in left side sit with the leash dragging.
2. Using a treat, lure the dog a quarter turn to the right.
3. Mark the movement then, as you stop, lure the dog into a “Sit” by moving the reward up your pant seam to your belt line. You and your dog should move and stop simultaneously. Also note that the lure placement controls dog location.
4. Repeat as needed.

Left Turn (Pivot): A left pivot is a quarter (90 degree) turn to the left.

1. The leash should be attached to the dog via a well-adjusted flat collar. Please don't use a harness or martingale for this exercise.
2. With the dog in a left side sit, put the leash behind your legs approximately at the level of the dog's collar. Hold the leash snugly in your right hand.
3. Pull the leash so that the dog's head is snug against your leg. This creates a pivot point.
4. Take the treat in your left hand and lure the dog's nose left.
 - a. Your hand should move laterally away from body so that the dog has to turn his head left to get the treat.
 - b. As the dog's head turns away from your body, the pivot point forces the dog's butt in towards your body.
 - c. Mark the butt movement in towards your body.
5. Move a quarter turn left simultaneously with the dog's movement.
6. The treat can be delivered in a sit simply by lifting your hand (and cue w/“Sit” if necessary).
7. As you become more fluid with the behavior, your dog should remain in the sit until released.

Training Tips:

- Don't take your eyes off your dog! You want to connect strongly during this exercise.
- Practice for very short stints at first.
- When you aren't actively training a walking technique, it is a good idea to use harnesses or other walking equipment to manage the pulling behavior. It is important that your dog not be allowed to practice impolite walking. (Please review our **Walking Equipment** handout).

Training Resources:

Marin Humane's **Behavior & Training** conducts regular **Family Dog Obedience** and **Loose Leash Walking & Recalls** classes. Sign up on our [Behavior & Training](#) page for the next available class or series.

Remember to license your dog (It's the LAW)! If your dog gets lost, a license tag on your dog's collar is the fastest way to reunite you and your dog. Even if your dog is microchipped, a license tag is immediately visible and doesn't require a scanning device to read. For more information about licensing, microchipping, and other services provided by **Marin Humane**, visit us at MarinHumane.org or stop by at 171 Bel Marin Keys Blvd, Novato, CA.