

## Loose Leash Walking TIPS

Often, there are many factors to consider when trying to teach your dog how to walk nicely on leash. Below are a few extra notes that may make a big difference in the loose leash walks with your pups. When the dogs are enrolled in the One-on-One training sessions, they will usually be working on most or all of the skills listed below.

### Leash Skills

Refer to Loose Leash Games Handout.

The "Perfect Pooch", "Catch Up", "Baby Steps" and stopping, "Turn and Go", and "Red Light, Green Light" games are the easiest way to teach the various cues used on leash. Start by playing these games all around the house and property, then play up and down your street, then start playing all around the neighborhood. The tasks involved in the Loose Leash Games will help keep your dog focused and channel mental energy. Also, the more behaviors you incorporate into your walks, the less distracted your dog will become, because they cannot focus on their feet and on distractions at the same time.

Give the dog tasks to channel energy, and as they master the skills, begin making things more challenging by fine tuning your cues (for example, instead of luring into a "stop" with a treat, begin using a verbal cue or gesture only and rewarding after the dog completes the behavior).

Additionally, you can begin adding new tasks, like climbing up on retaining walls, weaving trees, targeting objects, jumping over logs, etc. to teach the dog ways to interact with their environment. These are not required for a good loose leash walk, but the more mental energy the dog is able to burn while they are out, the more satisfied their brain will be later. Plus, tricks and tasks are a great way to make walks extra fun for both you (and the kids) and the dog, and build up confidence and focus while out.

### Focus

Because most dogs are SO distracted while out in the real world, you cannot overpay their attempts to check back in. The more we reinforce check-ins, the more often they will offer the



These materials are provided for you as a way to review behaviors previously discussed in training sessions. It is important for the success of both you and your dog, that these materials are used for reviewing, not for teaching. Do not skip ahead, even if you think your dog is ready. Every dog, every owner, and every situation is specific and requires a training program catered to fit; because these handouts are very general, please talk to Kelsey before attempting any of these training techniques on your own.



behavior and the less fixated they will become on walks. I mostly capture check-ins (check-ins are brief periods of eye contact with you after looking at a distraction) when the dog offers them, instead of asking for the dog to check in. This way, they offer them more frequently instead of looking away until they hear the cue to look back. Every time the dog looks at me, they get a goodie. If they look back at a distraction, then look back at me, they get another goodie.

If the dog is unable to check in or hasn't checked in for a long time, the environment may be too over-stimulating at that moment. Try walking somewhere a little calmer, or just pause for a period of time, so the dog can take everything in. When they are able to relax, they will be able to look back at you again.

## Doggie Point Scale & Trigger Stacking

Refer to the Doggie Point Scale Handout.

When the dog starts getting too high on the point scale, they are not able to be successful on walks. Pay attention to the point level, so you can help them settle back down if they are beginning to escalate. Also, if the dog is becoming trigger stacked, they may need to just take a break for awhile before moving on. Don't try to push through, if they are overstimulated, to get back into walking mode, it is better to just pause, let them wind back down, then continue with the walk.

Remember, everything in the dog's environment has a point value, if they are starting the walk at a level 7, they are going to have a hard time lowering the point level after experiencing excitement or distractions. Try to start your walk below a 5 and get the dog focused and working before going somewhere more challenging. For example, go for a 5 min sniffy walk around the parking lot of Home Depot, then do a 5 min working walk, before going inside.

If the point scale is maxed out after seeing a distraction, add distance from the distraction, block the line of sight by going around a corner or a barrier, and practice settling. Make sure to reinforce any attempt from the dog to focus on you or calm down. Then gradually get closer to the distraction when the dog is ready.



## Settling

Periodically on a walk, I like to pause and allow the dog to relax. Most of the time, walks are so high energy and high distraction that the dogs are never allowed the chance to be calm while out in public. Taking breaks and capturing calm behavior (like laying down) is a great way to bring the dog's point scale back to a reasonable level. Also, it allows the dog to decompress after a series of trigger stacking.

I ask the dog to "stop" then I take a deep breath and try to physically relax my body. I want to show the dog that I am just going to hang out there for a period of time. If there is a bench or seat available, I will often sit down to help demonstrate that we're not going to go anywhere for a little while. When the dog lies down, capture the behavior by feeding a jackpot of goodies in between their front paws. If they stay in a down for awhile or settle further by doing a lazy down (where they kick their legs out to one side) I'll give bonus goodies.

The more frequently you practice settling on a walk, the better. This is particularly good if you can achieve a relaxed, settled dog in situations that used to cause a high arousal level (like at the park, after seeing a barky dog, outside of a pet store, etc.).

## Replacement Behavior around Distractions

Every time I see a distraction that the dog is likely to react to, I immediately begin thinking about which replacement behavior will be most appropriate. In general, my go-to is asking the dog to sit and stay so they can watch the distraction go by. This is a much better option than lunging, barking, jumping, etc.

If the dog is able to sit and watch the distraction, I practice "leave it" every few seconds so the dog is not able to stare for a long duration. If they are still watching the distraction for over 2 seconds, then they are practicing a fixated mental state, which will likely result in a reaction. As soon as the dog checks in with me, I mark and treat and allow the dog to look back. At that point, the 2 second clock starts over and I repeat the leave it exercise. Every time the dog checks in, they get paid – even if they look right back at the distraction.



If the dog is not able to sit with the distraction present, they are too close. Turn and walk the other way and reinforce the “let’s go”. In this scenario, walking away from the distraction is the replacement behavior so make sure to reinforce the dog for coming with you, even if it takes a moment to get their focus back.

## Working Walk vs Sniffy Walk

Working walk: this is a loose leash walk, on a short (4-6 ft) leash, where the dog is walking relatively close to you, providing slack in the leash, checking in periodically, and responding to the leash cues (let’s go, stop, turn, etc.). I always clip the leash in front of the dog’s body for the working walk, by using a gentle leader or a front clip harness. During the working walk there is protocol for smelling things and for greeting. The dog needs to “say please” by sitting or checking in before being allowed to “say hello” and is only allowed to go smell and explore if given a cue to do so, or if they can sniff while still maintaining slack in the leash.

Sniffy walk: this is a free time walk for the dog, on a long line (10-30 ft), where the dog is able to go sniff, roll around in the dirt, pee on stuff, explore, hunt for goodies in the grass, etc. During a sniffy walk there are very few rules because this is the dog’s time to go be a dog! I always clip the long line on a back clip harness for this type of walk so the dog knows that it is time to go ahead and if they do pull, it won’t be harmful to them. I like to practice the Check-In Game (Refer to Recall Games Handout) while on the long line so the dog is able to fine tune the recall as well as practice disengaging from distractions.

I like to spend equal time on the working walk and the sniffy walk. If we expect the dogs to be engaged for long periods of time while on the working walk, we also need to give them the chance to sniff and explore. Sometimes I will practice both types of walks in one outing, other days I will do one versus the other. The main cue to the dog is the equipment change. Front clip + short leash for the working walk – back clip + long leash for the sniffy walk.



## Extra Things to Consider While Walking

- The dog only gets to move forward if there is slack in the leash (Red Light, Green Light game)
- Practice in low distraction environments before adding distractions – you might not leave your house the first few times, and that is OK!
- Always maintain a successful distance from high level distractions
- Give the dog plenty of tasks and outlets for mental energy
- Make walking fun!
- Leash pressure is a consequence, not a cue –think about the leash as a seat belt, not a steering wheel
- Give the dog opportunities to smell and de-stress
- Settle often
- You cannot overpay good behavior –you will easily go through an entire meals worth of food if you are treating appropriately
- Reinforce check-ins, every time!
- Staring is rude –only let the dog look at a distraction for 2 seconds at a time
- Nothing the dog does on a walk is punishable –if the dog is doing something naughty, they either do not understand the correct behavior or they are too high on the point scale
- Set the dog up for success
- Practice often –even if it is just a few laps around the house

**Please contact Kelsey with any questions, comments, or concerns!! Congratulations on helping your pup become Pawsitively Trained!**

**[Kelsey@PawsitivelyTrainedDogs.com](mailto:Kelsey@PawsitivelyTrainedDogs.com) (916) 899-9637**



These materials are provided for you as a way to review behaviors previously discussed in training sessions. It is important for the success of both you and your dog, that these materials are used for reviewing, not for teaching. Do not skip ahead, even if you think your dog is ready. Every dog, every owner, and every situation is specific and requires a training program catered to fit; because these handouts are very general, please talk to Kelsey before attempting any of these training techniques on your own.

