

Leash Training Your Adult Dog

http://www.gocalledonia.com/leash_training.html (edited and adapted)

When you adopt a dog from a shelter, you do not know his history. He may have had bad experiences with a leash, or on a leash. Or, he may never have been on a leash at all! In these instances, you'll need to start leash training from scratch. Patience is very important. Remember that your ultimate goal is for you and your dog to enjoy one another's company while on a daily walking routine.

.Begin by placing the collar and leash on your dog while she eats, letting the leash hang loosely by her side. This allows your dog to associate the leash with something pleasant (food) and helps her get used to having a collar around her neck.

.After two or three days, take the leash in your hand and follow her around the house for a few minutes after she's eaten. Do this for longer and longer periods, until your dog is used to both the leash and having you walk beside her.

.Next, go outside and let your dog drag the leash around, occasionally picking up the leash and following her. Offer her a treat while showing the leash.

.While walking, hold the leash in your right hand and coax your dog along your left side by holding a treat in your left hand. As you walk, repeat the phrase, "Let's go!" Praise your dog when she does well.

.If your dog starts to pull forward, do a clockwise turn and walk in another direction; the leash will pull her head to the side so she'll have to hurry to catch up with you.

More Leash Training Tips.

Make sure your dog's leash isn't too long. Four to six feet is ideal.

Conduct your outdoor training sessions in an area with few distractions, such as your backyard or a quiet park.

If your dog is overly excited, tire her out a little with vigorous play before placing her on the leash. A slightly fatigued dog is more attentive.

Never yell at or strike your dog while training. Patience pays!

What type of leash and collar should I use for training?

Using the proper leash and collar can help make your training successful. Most pet supply stores carry a wide selection. Many common types of leashes and collars are listed below:

Flat leash and buckle collar. Always start your training with these items. Make sure the collar fits well – too loose and he'll slip out; too tight and he'll be uncomfortable. You should be able to slip two fingers between his collar and his neck. Either nylon or leather are appropriate.

Retractable leash. Much like a fishing pole, this leash lets your pet wander up to 20 feet ahead while still under your control. Pushing the button takes up the slack. These are fine once your dog has learned to walk on a leash, but they are not recommended for training because they assert continual pressure on the collar and in order to train your dog not to pull, he needs to feel slack in the leash.

Head harness – a "Gentle Leader" or a "Halti." This unique collar attached to a leash keeps your dog under gentle control with a loop around her nose as well as her neck. It works like a horse harness whereby the dog is lead from his head and cannot pull. It doesn't restrict the mouth, and it thwarts lunging by transferring the forward motion into a sideways head turn. This type of lead is especially effective on energetic or difficult-to-control dogs.

The "Gentle Leader" seems to be the preferred brand because it's design provides a

seamless nose strap that appears to make dogs more comfortable when wearing it. Fitting a head harness can be tricky. Be sure to read fitting instructions carefully. Most dogs do not like to wear a head harness, but will get used to wearing one if walks are positive and exciting enough to distract them while you are training them. Strictly speaking, a head harness will not train a dog not to pull, it will merely prevent him from doing so. In theory, when dealing with a problem behavior (like leash pulling) it's better to train your dog out of the behavior rather than to merely prevent him from having the opportunity to exhibit the behavior. In reality, however, any device that can help you live more peacefully with your dog is a good thing! Most dogs desperately need a walk – a tired dog is a good dog! – and if you're not walking your dog because walking him is an unpleasant experience, then a head harness might be a godsend. Some very energetic, high-prey drive dogs may always be too distracted on walks to walk nicely without a head harness. Other dogs may mellow out with age and can move to a flat leash and buckle collar eventually.

A head harness should ONLY be used during a walk. If it's left on, your dog will figure out how to remove it and then it's effectiveness for walks is finished. Also, do not use a retractable leash with a head harness. If your dog reaches the end of the leash abruptly, he could get a neck-injuring yank to his head. A dog with a short, or recessed snout – like a Pug or Pekingese – will probably not be able to wear a head harness.

Prong collars. These collars, when attached to leads, control dogs by tightening around the neck or jabbing the throat with spikes. You pinch and release for the corrective action and quick attention--not to choke the dog. They're not for novice handlers and can be dangerous if used by inexperienced handlers.

Choke or slip collars are not recommended. These collars aren't really very effective for pulling. An energetic dog with high prey drive will simply drag you along, wheezing, choking and coughing at the end of the leash. Over time, this can cause a tracheal or neck injury. A dog that doesn't pull will walk nicely on a choke chain, but then, he'd also walk nicely on a regular buckle collar as well. Sometimes these are used for obedience training, but beware of training methods that require you to yank on the choke chain or issue harsh "leash corrections." Such methods are outdated and generally unnecessary. When training – especially when training a shelter dog of unknown history – it's always best to try the most positive methods first.

Body harness. These harnesses are good for dogs with physical body types that make them vulnerable to injury using other types of collars or harnesses. Your vet may recommend one if your dog has a tracheal or neck injury. Generally, they do not give you any more control over pulling than a regular buckle collar. With a healthy dog that is well-behaved on a leash, deciding whether to use a buckle collar or body harness is a personal choice. Be sure to check for sores or abrasions under the front legs where the harness can rub and chafe during exercise.