

# Anti-pulling on Leash

Dogs naturally pull on the leash and there are several reasons for this. By pulling on the leash, a dog is usually inadvertently rewarded by the owner in the form of forward movement. The dog pulls because pulling works. He never finds out that not pulling would also have worked because the natural pace of most dogs is faster than the natural pace of the owner. The dog hits the end of the leash immediately and thus, self-teaches to pull. This is not an issue of rank as extremely submissive dogs pull on the leash with as much abandon as more confident dogs. The other reason dogs pull, even to the point of gasping for breath in obvious discomfort, is that dogs have what is called an opposition reflex. As soon as they feel pressure against their necks or chests, they reflexively lean into it. This is part of the reason Huskies and Malamutes, as well as a lot of other breeds, love pulling in harness. It is intrinsically rewarding.

So given what you're up against, it is prudent to begin anti-pull training from day one, rather than waiting until the dog has an entrenched pulling addiction. The main pull prevention exercise for puppies or dogs that do not already have a strong pulling habit is:-

## THE RED-LIGHT/GREEN-LIGHT GAME

### Rule

While on a walk with the dog, you may only move forward if the leash is loose. As soon as the dog tightens the leash, you freeze dead in your tracks.

A loose leash is the **green** light signal – the handler can move forward. A tight leash is the **red** light signal – the handler stops.

Moving in the direction the dog wants to go is a potent reward, which you must never give for pulling on leash.

### Method

The first time you play this game, the dog will do a bit of lunging and straining when you put the brakes on.

1. Wait until eventually, by chance, he slackens the leash.
2. Then start moving.
3. As soon as you move he will re-energise and no doubt hit the end of the leash, causing you to stop again.

The dog requires a number of repetitions to understand that tightening the leash grinds the walk to a halt every single time, whilst slackening the leash allows him to move forward. However the dog does not learn to walk on a loose leash in one session. What you get, rather, is a gradual decrease in attempt at pulling. So, keep it up!

If you already have an existing pulling problem, you will probably have to use heavier artillery, training-wise than the red-light/green-light game.

### Options

- 1) Try the red-light/green-light game.
- 2) Play the game but with active corrections and/or penalties
- 3) Change equipment

### **Active Corrections and/or Penalties**

A better way to beef up the red-light/green-light game is to give the dog distance penalties for pulling, such as a “one yard penalty” or a “3-yard penalty”. When the dog starts to pull on leash, he is warned, pulled back and then you retreat some distance to make the dog cover the same piece of ground again. A good motto is “ we’ll keep doing this patch of pavement until you do it without pulling.” The first few times out, the dog will likely have to do the same piece of ground many times in a row before he figures out that it’s his pulling which is giving him the penalty. You can make this clear by marking the initiation of pulling with “Too bad!” or “AH! AH!” which signals him that you are about to remove a reward: progress forward. When you retreat to re-try a piece of ground, make sure the leash is slack before commencing another stab at forward walking.

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