



# Causes of conflict Let's walk together

Our dogs pulling on the lead can be extremely frustrating, and it is never helped by people having a friendly little joke in the street about “who’s taking who for a walk”.

It is worth remembering that when this is happening, it is not only you who is frustrated. If our dogs were more interested in being with us as a team than in getting to where they want to go, they would not be pulling... how do we fix this?

## Let's see what's going on here

When we walk with friends we are engaged with, we naturally adapt our pace to suit theirs. When we walk around our homes with our dogs, they tend to walk very closely to us and stay engaged, looking at our faces and wanting to be part of what we are doing. So why does this all change when we leave the front door?

At home, there is usually nothing more interesting than us. Even in a busy household, the dog learns that all that activity is just normal life, and engaging with you is the most exciting thing available. Our dogs want to be part of that and enjoy being with us.

When we take our dogs out, we often think of it as their time, something we owe them. For many dogs this becomes an entitlement. People say their dogs demand a walk and will not settle until they have had one. We would not generally accept our teenagers being that demanding.

It was not so long ago that many dogs were kept outside in kennels and rarely allowed in the house. Dogs kept in an eight foot by eight foot run had very little daily stimulation except for their walks. Without exercise they would lose fitness and not be strong enough to work, so it became fixed in the human mind that dogs need daily exercise.

Dogs enjoy walks and they are generally very good for their bodies and minds, but they do not always need extra exercise if they already have plenty of quality time and interaction at home. If our dogs are showing problematic behaviour, there is no issue with taking back some privileges until they are showing more cooperative behaviours again.

## Setting ourselves up for success

Once we get frustrated, it can be difficult to reset. We want our dogs to learn to walk nicely, but this will not happen overnight.

We can help ourselves by using a double ended lead with a two point connection harness. There are several available. Ruffwear, Mekuti and Perfect Fit.

Headcollars are somewhat controversial in modern dog training. The halter type headcollars work by turning the dog's direction, which prevents them from being able to pull. It is understandable that this can cause some frustration for the dog, but they do not cause actual harm in the way that a shock collar or prong collar might.

Figure of eight halters constrict, restrict breathing and cause pain, but curiously most dogs seem more accepting of them. I am only recommending the Halti and Dogmatic types here for the sake of safety



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first while our dogs are learning.

If you use a head collar together with a double ended lead with one end fixed to the front D ring of your harness, you can substantially reduce any amount of aversive pull on the dog's face, so making it considerable more comfortable for your dog, which in turn will aid their learning.

### **Physical exercises, teaching the position**

There are several ways to do this and they are interchangeable depending on your situation and your dog. A lot of running around might not be advisable on a hot day or on uneven ground.

#### **Method 1: the tango**

This is a fun game that can be played in the park instead of going off lead. If your dog is too wired from free time to engage, sit together for a moment. You can even read to your dog until they are steady enough to work through the foundation skills.

Start by giving your dog a treat, then take a step away and encourage your dog to follow. Reward.

Take another step, backwards or sideways. As your dog moves towards you, reward again.

Think of team sports at school when someone marked you to stop you getting the ball. We are using the reward marker for the dog staying close to us.

Once you are struggling to get away from your dog because they are consistently catching up, you are ready for the next stage.

As your dog moves towards you, move forwards past their shoulder. Your dog now has to turn to keep up. As they turn their body, they naturally align themselves at knee to shoulder position. Mark and drop the reward on the ground behind your foot.

#### **Method 2: Align by hand flow**

Using a hand touch with your dog facing you, guide them into a behind you position. As your dog walks past your knee, extend your leg back slightly so your dog has to go a little further before coming around. Think of the movement you might make to check for chewing gum on your shoe.

This gives you a little extra time to capture the moment your dog comes forward again to shoulder level with your knee. As they do, mark and drop the reward behind you.

Aim for the reward to land about eighteen inches, forty centimetres, behind you. Consider the ground surface and use treats that are easy to see.

Mix it up a little. We do not always have to move forwards. Take a couple of steps backwards and reward your dog for keeping up.



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### **The next step: Adding the rules, our rules**

Dogs are not trying to be naughty when they pull. They simply want to get from A to B quickly. Every time we pull on the lead, we teach them to pull back. The lead is not a handle. It is only a connection that stops our dogs running off. It is also an offence under the Road Traffic Act to have a dog off lead on any public highway, including quiet roads and cul de sacs.

### **Your dog will not pull if they are enjoying being on lead with you.**

Always give your dog some indication that you are about to move. I use two taps on my leg. Telling your dog off for pulling makes being with you less rewarding. Talking to your dog, playing small tricks and fun games, and creating reward moments makes it more rewarding.

“Oopsie daisies” is hard to say without smiling, which is why I use it to let my dog know we did not get it right that time and we will try again.

Smiling and touching your dog's neck and shoulders can help them feel more connected to you and walk closer, unless they dislike being touched. Think of how we walk with friends; we touch, point things out and share the moment.

### **The conflicting issues, or what if the boot were on the other foot**

For many people this is one of the toughest skills to master. There are so many factors stacked in conflict between humans and dogs that it can feel like an impossible task. But if, instead of trying to force the issue, we look at it as a chain of small pieces, we can repair each one step at a time.

#### **1. Dogs naturally walk faster than us**

Smaller dogs have a smaller stride. Larger dogs with a longer stride have to put real effort into slowing down to match us. We can compare this to walking with a small child who has just learned to walk independently, or with a very elderly person who can no longer walk fast. It is not easy for any length of time. It can become uncomfortable and even a bit irritating if you are in a hurry to reach the end destination.

#### **2. Dogs are curious**

Imagine you are walking down the high street and you notice the sales are on. There are things you would love to look at, but the people you are with have other plans and you have to keep up with them. You might decide you can always come back later. A dog cannot. They have a choice; ignore their interest for you, or ignore you for their interest. What would you choose if you were your dog?

#### **3. Who is pulling who**

This is a big one. We focus so hard on them pulling us that we forget to tell them when we are about to move or change direction. I have seen so many dogs dragged across a floor because the owner was chatting to someone, then suddenly said goodbye and walked off without once looking down to let the dog know they were moving. Dogs are non verbal. They cannot be part of the conversation. They do not know you are about to leave unless you tell them.



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## **The bench tour, building team “My dog and I”**

A very helpful exercise is to stop walking to the places your dog expects to be let off lead. Instead, make a little map of all the street benches in your area. Take your dog, and maybe bring a blanket for it to sit on. You can place this on the bench or by your feet depending on whether your dog is usually allowed on furniture, and a snack to share. Sharing food is something we do with friends, so do some dogs. It's a great place to start if you want to show your dog that you are 'friends', and make a little bit of a thing of how special this is for you both as you sit for a few minutes watching the world go by.

This prevents the pattern of racing to the off lead area, and it also builds the idea that you and your dog 'work' together. Anything that captures your dog's attention, “mark” with your marker word, I use yes, then reward. Here your dog learns that what they see, you see. It is about building the team: team my dog and I. If you practice this for two or three weeks, you will see real progress in lead walking, connection and recall.

## **Games to make long stretches of walking ‘fun’:**

### **Sit to whistle**

Randomly pip your whistle and cue a sit; make sure you really let your dog know how glad you are with their super fast response. Reward generously. Do not repeat more than 5 times in any walk to avoid it becoming 'boring' for your dog.

### **Twirl**

Teach your dog to turn a circle following your hand  
Once your dog is consistently following your hand in a circle; add a verbal cue word (twirl)

### **Oops, clumsy me**

If your dog likes to pick things up, take a cloth or a spare lead out with you, pretend to drop it and encourage your dog to pick it up and hand it back.

### **Walking backwards**

### **Changing sides**

### **Walk behind me**

### **Weaving around bollards and posts**

### **Walking along street benches and small walls**

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