

Training Exercises for New Lisbon Raisers

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Loose Leash Walking Tips (adapted from Positively with Victoria Stilwell, Animal Humane Society)

- **Start Reinforcing Your Dog Immediately**

- Seize the moment! While your dog is still near you and before she ever gets the chance to bolt forward and tighten the leash, quickly say, “Yes!” and offer her a treat. Avoid reaching toward your dog; instead, deliver the treat close to your body and slightly ahead of you. Why offer a treat right out of the gate? Well, in those first few seconds the leash was still slack, and that’s the goal, so don’t miss the opportunity to highlight that good behavior!

- **Talk to Your Dog While Walking**

- Use your voice to stay connected with your dog while walking. I find that the dogs I work with are more likely to shoot a glance my way if they hear my voice. As we’re walking, I might say with a happy tone, “Where should we go today?” If I get a tail wag or an ear flick, I’ll take that as a sign of interest and I’ll add a little more excitement to my tone. That will usually elicit a glance my way, and bingo! – I’ve got something to mark and reward.
- As you move forward, feel free to whistle or make a kissy sound or say their name to encourage your dog to look at you. When she does, mark with a “Yes!” and reward with a treat. Repeat frequently, say, every six to 10 steps, always in motion if possible.
- If you wonder whether you’ve done enough repetitions of attracting her attention with noises, try staying quiet as you walk. If she checks in with you of her own volition, you know she’s caught on! Mark and treat her spontaneous check-ins, and tell her the walk is still on (“Let’s go!”).

- **Keep Reinforcing Your Dog**

- I mentioned earlier that I still reward my own dog for behaviors that I like when we walk together. She is no longer in training, but I continue to reinforce the check-in behavior in order to maintain it, either with food or with a few upbeat words.
- Checking in is such a friendly habit, and it’s no different from what we already do when walking and talking with a friend. Every now and then, we’ll turn our head to the side to look at our friend as she speaks. It shows we’re listening and it keeps us connected. Keep that connection strong with your own dog, and you’ll see her leash-walking skills grow quickly.

- **The Stop and Be Still Technique**

- Leash pulling is often successful for the dog because the person inadvertently reinforces the pulling by allowing the dog to get to where she wants to go when she pulls. But you can change this picture by changing the consequence for your dog.
- Whenever she pulls, immediately stop and stand completely still until the leash relaxes because your dog either takes a step back or turns around to give you focus. When the leash is nicely relaxed, proceed on your walk. Repeat this as necessary.
- If the dog pulls ahead, stop walking immediately. Call your dog back to you or use the treats in your hand to lure the dog back to your side, but don’t treat her yet: take two to three steps

forward before feeding. This is to prevent teaching a sequence like: “I pull a head, I come back, I eat.” We want them to learn that walking alongside you on a loose leash makes treats happen, not pulling.

- Gradually take more steps between each treat. You can talk to your dog to help keep her attention on you.
- Trainers often recommend that we stop moving forward if there is tension in the leash. The logic behind this is that by stopping we avoid reinforcing a pulling behavior. This technique is often successful in helping a dog learn not to pull; if she wants to move forward, she has to keep the leash slack.

- **The Reverse Direction Technique**

If you find the preceding technique too slow, you can try the *reverse direction* method.

- When your dog pulls, issue a 'let's go' cue, turn away from her, and walk off in the other direction without jerking on the leash.
- You can avoid yanking by motivating your dog to follow you with an excited voice to get her attention.
- When she is following you and the leash is relaxed, turn back and continue on your way.
- It may take a few turns, but your vocal cues and body language will make it clear that pulling will not be reinforced with forward movement, whereas walking calmly by your side or even slightly in front of you on a loose leash will allow your dog to get to where she wants to go.
- You can also reinforce your dog's decision to walk close to you by giving her a motivating reward when she is by your side.
- To help your dog pay closer attention to you while walking on leash, change directions frequently. This should never be done by suddenly pivoting and jerking the leash. Always let your dog know you're about to change directions by teaching her a cue – I like to use “This way!” Slow down gradually and say your cue. Stop walking and wait for your dog to turn back to see why you've stopped. This may take a moment; be patient. When she looks back at you, mark the check-in with a “Yes!” and when your dog starts to walk toward you to get her treat, start moving in the new direction. As she catches up with you, deliver the treat and say, “Let's go!” Repeat this exercise often, and always gently. Your dog will soon figure out that “This way!” indicates you're about to change directions, and she'll more easily check in with you.

- **Vary the Picture**

- Once your dog is listening to you, you can vary the picture even more by becoming unpredictable yourself. This requires your dog to listen to you at all times, because she never knows when you might turn or where you are going to go next.
- Instead of turning away from her when you give the 'let's go' cue, reverse direction by turning toward her. You can turn in a circle or do a figure eight. Any of these variations will get your dog's attention.
- Do not forget to praise her for complying, because the better you make her feel when she is walking close to you, the more she will choose to do so.

- **What Not to Do:**

Do not yank your dog around. While it might be tempting to use your dog's leash to correct her, rely more on teaching her what to do than correcting her all the time.

- **Common Leash Training Issues**

- Your dog just isn't checking in with you: If your dog was previously checking in with you but has stopped doing so, then the distractions might just be too much for your dog. If you're unable to practice in a quieter area, try making the exercise easier. Rather than walking a long distance, stay within a few yards and keep covering the same area over and over again. That particular area will no longer be as exciting to your dog and it will become easier to capture her attention. This should offer you more opportunities to reinforce the behavior you want.

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Ideal walking position. Notice that the dog is slightly ahead of the handler