

A New Leash on Life

In an ideal world our dogs walk loosely on-leash and respond correctly to our instructions. But it's not a perfect world! Very often, we find that we are the ones being walked by our dogs.

As in all training, working on leash walking should be fun and relaxed for both you and your pet. This is especially true when working with shy or excitable dogs. Leash walking should never become a battle between you and your dog, and should never include anything that could damage your relationship with your canine companion.

So why do dogs pull on leashes? First, pulling behavior stems from “opposition reflex,” or a dog’s instinctive behavior to lean into pressure on their bodies, which turns many pups into bulldozers when going out for a daily stroll. One of the most important aspects of leash walking is having the equipment best suited to your dog. The proper equipment will be well-fitted, serve as an effective management and/or training tool, and will not be harmful to your dog.

We discourage the use of devices that can physically hurt your dog, such as choke chains and prong/pinch collars. While some people may see results with this equipment, it can significantly damage your relationship with your dog. In fact, when you train using intimidation or pain this can actively teach your dog to be afraid of you, when we want the opposite – we want your dog to have fun walking with you!

Fortunately, there are many types of effective, humane and pet-friendly walking gear can help train your dog in a positive way:

FLAT BUCKLE COLLAR:

If your dog walks reasonably well on leash, a flat buckle collar may be all you need for an enjoyable stroll with your buddy. These collars should be made of leather or sturdy webbing material, and always check the buckle to ensure it is strong and will not pop open should your dog become excited and lunge to the end of his/her leash.

MARTINGALE COLLAR:

This type of “limited slip” collar has a loop that contracts a small amount should your dog pull or try to back out of the collar. This is not tight enough to “choke” your dog; it simply provides a bit of extra control when it is needed and also distributes the pressure around the neck so that the dog is less likely to pull.



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SENSE-ATION™ HARNESS:

Our other favorite leash walking product is the SENSE-ation body harness. This harness is different from the traditional body harness in that the leash attaches to a ring at the dog's breastbone rather than on the dog's back. The SENSE-ation works similarly to a head halter in that it places far less pressure on the dog's body and instead of creating a backward pulling feeling these harnesses are designed to work with pulling a leash upwards, sideways or forward. As long as a leash is not pulled backwards, the pet does not feel the need to lean into the harness, which reduces pulling on the leash.

HEAD HALTERS:

Head halters, which have a ring on the underside of the dog's chin where the leash attaches, make it easy for you to turn your dog's head gently in order to "steer" him away from distractions or in the direction you would like to go. There are many kinds of head halters on the market, but the two that we work with are the Gentle Leader® and the Comfort Trainer. A properly fitted halter will still allow your dog to pant, drink water, and eat treats. With any head halter, it is very important to never jerk your dog's leash – this can cause very serious damage to your dog's neck.

Whichever tool you choose for leash walking, it is important to go slowly when introducing your dog to a new device. This is especially true for head halters – having something on his/her face is a novel experience for most dogs, and so will require slow introduction using treats and praise.

Remember our mantra – training should be fun for both you and your dog! Make it into a game, and your dog will love strutting their stuff in new leash walking attire!