



# LET'S GO LOOSE LEASH WALKING Level 1

***Goal:** Teaching a dog to walk on a loose leash is one of the most important behaviors to work on. It's also one of the most time consuming and difficult behavior to teach as it requires consistency and patience from the handler. The goal is to teach the dog to walk by our side, either to the left or to the right, within 1ft. of our leg. The dog's head should be at the level of your leg or slightly ahead. The dog should synchronize his/her movements with yours, change direction, slow down, speed up and stop anytime you do.*

*The following steps are to be taught in the order described as in each step the dog learns concepts needed for the next one.*

*It's essential that the dog CANNOT pull on the leash at ANY time, even on very short trips, such as from the house to the car. ANY movement forward on a tight leash will reward pulling*

TRAINING PLAN		
1.	<b>Follow the feel</b>	In a place with no distraction, hold the leash and apply very light pressure on your dog's leash (do not pull on the leash). Wait until the dog moves into the direction of the pressure, even if just a shift of the body or a tiny step. Click and treat. Repeat until the dog intentionally releases the pressure and moves in the direction of the pressure of the leash. Wait for your dog to take a few steps following the feel of the leash, click and treat. Gradually increase the number of steps. Make sure you also vary the direction in which you guide the dog. Repeat until the dog consistently and easily moves in the direction of the very light pressure.
2.	<b>Make a U turn</b>	With your dog on leash and a front attach harness, start walking. As soon as the dog gets out of position (any step ahead of you), turn around and walk in the opposite direction. You may go back and forth on the same piece of sidewalk for a while before you can start to go anywhere, but the point is not to take a walk, but to teach the dog to focus on you. Click and treat for position and eye contact. Test the dog's focus by slowing down, speeding up and changing directions. You'll want to see the dogs' head slightly tilted towards you.
3.	<b>Penalty Yards</b>	In this exercise, the dog will learn that getting out of position will get him further away from where they want to go. Just as in the previous exercise, walk with your dog and click and treat for good position. As soon as they get out of position, back up briskly. Let the leash slide in your hands until you reach the handle. This is not about tugging the dog but encouraging them to follow you. You'll want to back up until the dog's head is at the level of your legs then move forward again. The dog will naturally get in position. Take a few steps forward and when the dog is in position, click and treat. <b>DO NOT CLICK THE DOG FOR COMING TOWARDS YOU. ALWAYS CLICK AND TREAT FOR</b>



		STAYING IN POSITION (not getting ahead, then back in position). As you progress with this exercise, you'll notice that you'll need to back up less and less and the dog will automatically start to correct their position.
4.	<b>Being a tree</b>	This step should not be started until the dog has gained concepts from the previous steps. When the dog is consistently checking in with you and easily getting back in position as soon as you start backing up, they're ready for this step. With your clicker in the same hand as the leash, start walking with your dog. Click and treat every time your dog is in position. As soon as your dog moves forward (out of position), stop. Do not take any steps forward while the leash is tight or when the dog is not focused on your movements. Let the dog learn that a tight leash means that you're not going anywhere. When the dog puts slack in the leash and pays attention to you, start walking again. Click and treat AFTER A FEW STEPS (2-3), as long as the dog maintains the position. Make sure to treat in the "reward zone", in other words, treat where the dog should be positioned. You can aim for the seam of your pants as a guide or even reward behind you. As the dog gets better, you'll want to increase the criteria and click for eye contact while they are walking along your side.
5.	<b>Increasing criteria</b>	Increase the criteria by placing an object of value on the floor, away from the dog. You can use treats, a toy, or even a person that the dog is excited to reach. Don't let the dog reach those items unless the leash is loose and they are in position. If not, either 1/ "be a tree", and see if the dog will correct or 2/ back up (penalty yards) to where you first started, or 3/ make a U turn and walk away from the item then try again. Once you're able to work your way up to the item, ask the dog to sit, pay attention to you, then allow contact with the item with the cue "Free".
6.	<b>Adding the cue</b>	At this point, the dog should have developed the ability to pay more attention to you and even if they still occasionally get out of position, they should quickly re-adjust when you adopt one of the 3 techniques you have practiced ("Being a tree", "Penalty yards" and "Make a U Turn". Start saying the words "let's go" as you take a step forward.
7.	<b>Increasing criteria</b>	Changing your speed and your direction to encourage your dog to pay more attention to you and less attention to whatever else is going on. If your dog knows a few other behaviors, you can occasionally stop and ask for a "sit" or a "down", then move forward again with a "let's go".
8.	<b>Variable rate of reinforcement</b>	Gradually increase the number of steps before you click and treat. Moving forward is rewarding so work towards having to treat only occasionally.
9.	<b>Adding distractions</b>	Repeat this process while gradually adding distractions. Distractions can be a sound at a distance, a person sitting nearby, all the way to dogs running close by. Gradually build up the levels of distractions so the dog can succeed at every step of the way.
10.	<b>Generalization</b>	Repeat the steps in different areas. You may first start in your backyard, then move to the sidewalk in your neighborhood, then the local park, the mall etc.
11.	<b>Fluency</b>	Gradually build up the level of difficulty until your dog walks by your side and synchronizes with your movements while on a leash, in all sorts of places with lots going on.

CONGRATULATIONS! If you've come this far, you have taught the dog to walk on a loose leash in all situations no matter what is going on.



*Troubleshooting:* depending on the dog, your strength level and the situation, there can be times where walking is more challenging than usual. It can be useful to get the dog used to a Gentle Leader or other Head Halter. These devices are not meant to be educational tools, but can make a big difference in how well you'll be able to control the dog and keep his/her focus on you.