



Puppy Raising

Walking on a lead

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1. Walking on a lead

In this section

In this section you'll learn how to teach your puppy to walk on a relaxed lead with minimal tension in a position that is head and shoulders in front of you. This is important for the comfort and safety of your puppy, members of the public and you. It's also important for your puppy's future partner, their friends and family and other volunteers and is one of the most valued behaviours for our guide dog partners.

Quick links

By following each link below, you will be directed to the area within this guidance to support that area of learning.



Why



Knowing your puppy



Managing for success



Teaching foundations



Being a partnership



Why

Why is this important for a guide dog?

This video explains why this behaviour is so important. Having a dog that pulls strongly on the end of the lead, or lunges to get to things they want, can be a safety risk for their guide dog partner and you.

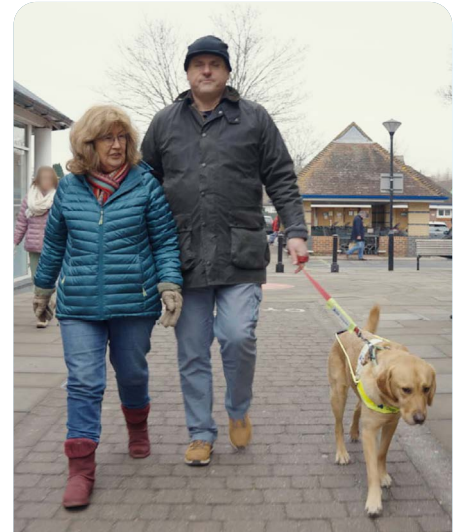


Knowing your puppy

It takes time and consistency to teach your puppy to walk on a lead. It's important for you to always keep in mind that a lead can be viewed as a restrictive piece of equipment, that functions as a barrier to your puppy behaving as they would choose to, if they were free. There is therefore a risk that your puppy may develop frustration related behaviours, such as barking, and behaviours that present a safety concern to the person holding the lead, such as pulling strongly on the lead or lunging.

Strong pulling or lunging is a risk to the physical wellbeing of your puppy due to their sensitive neck area and may cause injury. These problem behaviours develop because your puppy is trying to get to smells, other dogs, or the opportunity to be off lead, which are all things that are naturally reinforcing to them, and not because of any 'naughtiness' or malice within your puppy.

If pulling on the lead works, then this behaviour will be repeated. So, your role is to teach them the foundation skills of lead walking, and that the opportunity to access rewards comes as a result of walking nicely.



Video: Guide Dog owner with sighted assistance with dog on a lead.



Managing for success

Lead walking can take time to teach and develop, especially in distracting environments.

Choose a time of day when your puppy has toileted, is comfortable and most likely to focus on the exercise and you. Start with short exercises of not more than 5 minutes and always remember to have fun.

While you're still teaching it, there will be occasions when you need to take your puppy on lead into an area where maintaining a relaxed lead is too difficult for them, or when you don't have the time to practice.

In this situation you must first speak to your Puppy Development Advisor who may issue Guide Dogs approved equipment such as a t-touch harness or a head collar. Advice as to how to introduce this equipment will be supplied.

In very distracting situations when you need to gain or keep your puppy's attention you can use an 'magnet lure' (either a food reward or a toy) held close to their nose to follow. This allows you to get to where you need to go without your puppy practicing pulling.

The key point for management with lead walking is to prevent your puppy from pulling into the collar and moving forward. This is because the forward movement rewards the pulling behaviour.



Photo: A puppy wearing equipment.



Photo: A puppy wearing equipment.



Teaching foundations

Stage 1: Attaching the lead

- In your home or garden clip your puppy's lead on to their collar. It's normal that your puppy may be very interested in the lead and possibly even attempt to chew it.
- If your puppy continues to tug gently, place the lead down if safe to do so. Use your voice to distract your puppy from doing so in encouraging tone, followed by luring away with food if required.
- Begin delivering food rewards when the puppy chooses to move towards or remain near you without interacting with the lead. They don't necessarily need to be looking at you for this.
- Ensure you are holding the lead in a way that it remains relaxed throughout; there shouldn't be any pressure on your puppy's collar.

Stage 2: Add movement

If your puppy isn't moving with you, please speak with your PDA. Your puppy may sit at times or chew at the lead. Please don't worry, this skill takes time to learn. You'll need several sessions to work on this behaviour.

Stage 3: Build awareness of your movements:

As your puppy learns to walk with you, we want them to be increasingly aware of your movements and respond to them. Here are a few exercises that will help build on this:



Video: Early walking on a lead.



Video: Excitable lead behaviour.

I stop; you stop...

- Once your puppy is walking with you for several steps and is maintaining the position with a relaxed lead, try stopping without saying anything to your puppy. If they immediately stop with you, then calmly praise them. If they continue to the end of the lead, wait for them to refocus on you and return to you.
- Continue forward and reward as before.

I change direction; you change direction...

Repeat the above exercise, changing direction, rather than stopping. Reward the point at which they notice and change direction with you, in the reward zone. You can reward with vocal praise, gentle touch or food.

I change pace; you change pace...

Repeat the above exercise, speeding up and slowing down, rather than stopping or changing direction. Reward the point at which they notice and change their speed to remain at your side.

The desired end behaviour is your puppy walking with their head and shoulders ahead of you on a relaxed lead, with minimal tension.

Yo-yoing:

This describes when a puppy walks ahead to the end of the lead, returns to you then immediately walks to the end of the lead again. This can be frustrating when you're holding the lead, as you never seem to progress with walking because you keep needing to stop every time your puppy pulls. To work on resolving this, pay careful attention to when you are rewarding your puppy, and to what behaviour you have just observed immediately before rewarding them. Here are two key points that will help:

- Continue to reward as they walk alongside you, this may involve changing your own walking speed. Be

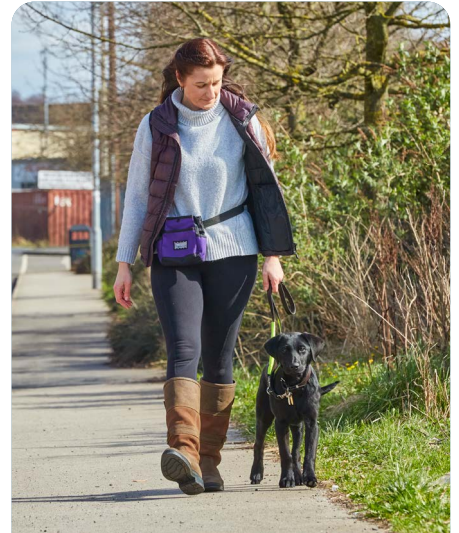
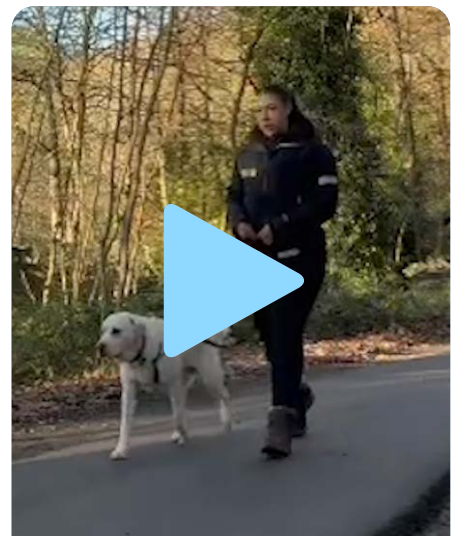


Photo: Young puppy walking.



Video: Changing direction on a lead.

generous with the number of food rewards you give but you can vary the time interval between each reward. So, for example, you may reward them after two paces of walking by your side, then five paces, then one pace, then four paces.

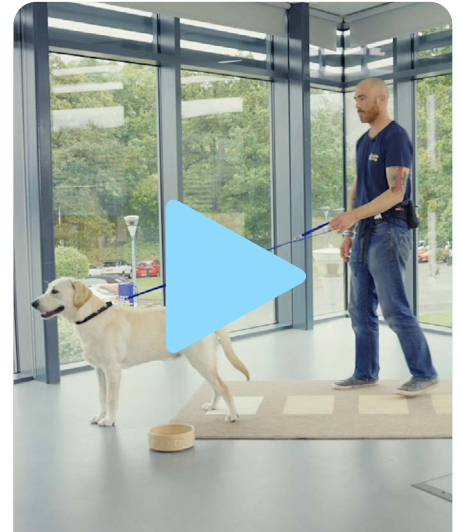
- Focus on the behaviour you want. Try to time the reward before they reach the end of the lead, rather than waiting for them to bounce all the way back to you.

If you need to move your puppy away from a distraction or difficult situation, you can use a food lure on the puppy's nose, like a magnet until you're at a safe distance.

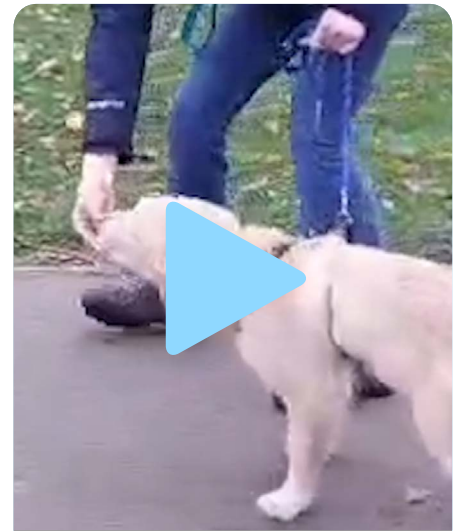
Progression

Move out of your house and garden and gradually build up the level of difficulty by working in more distracting environments. You may need to initially increase the frequency of rewards for walking with you and/or increase the value of rewards as distractions get harder.

Slowly fade out the number of rewards given to your puppy but continue to interact and engage with your puppy. You may be able to do this in some environments quicker than others.



Video: Yo-yoing on a lead.



Video: Using a magnet lure.



Being a partnership

- Young puppies will need time to take in new environments, sights and sounds. Allow your puppy time to take in their surroundings, making sure they are comfortable before training lead walking.
- If your puppy pulls on lead. Please read the document [Being out and about](#) for support on managing distractions.
- If your puppy won't take food: This could be because the environment you're working in is too distracting. Go back to less distracting environments to build up your lead walking. You could experiment with what your puppy finds most rewarding e.g., more tasty food, a toy, vocal praise, and encouragement or even a break to go and have a sniff.
- If you would like more support or if at any point you're struggling to manage, then speak to your Puppy Development Advisor. Do not put yourself at risk.
- Continually monitor your puppy's body language. If your puppy is generally progressing well, but seems to be struggling in some environments, use their body language to help you work out why. Is it due to excitement or could they be anxious?
- It's also worth noting this is one of the hardest things for your puppy to learn. Teaching lead walking takes a lot of time, consistency, and patience from you.



Video: Young puppy stopping to look.



Video: Older puppy stopping and solutions.