

Walking your dog (Revisited)

The basic information provided in the previously released document (walking_track_B.docx) remains applicable. However, this lesson provides more details, and offers tips to make that information more useful.

First, it is necessary to understand why dogs tug, forge, lurch, etc.:

- Excess Energy. Our dogs need a lot of exercise to burn some off some of that excess.
- Inquisitiveness. Our dogs are highly intelligent, and an intelligent dog wants to learn about everything that they see.
- Prey drive. When dogs are outside, they are instinctively aware that there may be natural prey (something to eat) around, and they want to search for it.
- Dominance testing. In the wild, the alpha animal goes first. They may be testing their handler to establish their pack position with their handler.
- Human/dog emotion transfer. Too often, we are in a hurry to get someplace when we are walking our dog. The dog picks up on our urgency, and feels the same urgency.

Fortunately, most of the techniques and tips provided in “Walking Track B” and below are applicable, independent of the reason for the improper behavior, with exceptions noted below.

First, it becomes apparent that we need to divide our walks into one of three groups:

1. We are going someplace, to do something, and the dog is accompanying us.
2. We are walking the dog to give it needed exercise.
3. We are walking the dog with the specific intent of training it to walk properly.

Groups 1 and 2, can, and should, be employed to perfect skills already introduced, but are not very effective for basic training of new skills, especially for puppies. Group 1 is ineffective, because the handler’s priorities are elsewhere, and they usually do not care to spend the time necessary to do the basic training. Group 2 is ineffective because, if done properly, the will dog will actually get very little exercise. So, the remainder of this lesson addresses how to specifically teach a dog to walk properly. This can be applied to new puppies, but should work equally well with on older dog to address problems.

Note: The following procedure should be practiced by every member of the family, at some point, but early emphasis should be with the child doing it. This is because the dog will test each handler, to see what they can get by with. So, it is possible that the dog will walk perfectly with one member, but tug and lunge with another, if they have been successful with that in the past.

Comfortable with the leash. Before we even start addressing the walking problems, we want to be sure that the dog is calm, and comfortable with the leash. So, just put the leash on, and walk around the house in places the dog is familiar with. Keep a loose leash, and stop often. Don't worry if they are not at heel, just that they are calm, and not tugging. If they tug, just turn your back and ignore them. You should not go outside until they are calm. If they have not calmed down in 15 minutes, terminate the exercise and try again another time. You may feel like nothing was accomplished. However, you have taught them that they don't get to go out into that exciting outdoor world every time they see the leash.

Go outdoors. Be sure that you have a short leash, or grasp the leash so that you have only 6 to 12 inches of slack when the dog is standing close to you. I prefer to have a special training leash, which is only about 2 feet long, so that you do not have to remember to choke up on the regular leash.

Repeat the same procedure as above, but now do a quick jerk with the leash if they tug. Now, when you tug, you should introduce the command "Heel" by first saying "Come Heel". You will gradually drop the "Come" and just say "Heel". If that doesn't work, turn your back on them. Don't even start walking until the dog is calm, with a loose leash. Again, you may spend a lot of time just standing. First start walking in a familiar area, like your yard. If they tug, give a quick tug, and stop immediately. Call them to you. For starters, you can give them a treat when they are close, but quickly graduate to praise. Then try again. When you start, you will spend most of your time tugging and standing. The lesson that the dog is learning here is that they don't get anywhere if they tug.

Go for a real walk. Just like above, except that if when you tug and say "Heel", they slack off of their tug, you can praise them and keep walking. If your dog is proficient with the "Watch Me" command, it can be helpful to use that often to get them to look up at you. Note that a dog cannot watch you if it is forging ahead. Other things that are helpful are:

Change your walking speed regularly, including many stops.

Do the "Crazy Walk". I.e., change directions randomly very often. This is best done in a parking lot, or park.

Grocery shopping is a good training exercise. There are many natural stops. Also weaving through areas like many produce departments is good, because you can walk close to the many islands which forces the dog to get behind you.

For especially stubborn dogs (like Bandit), you can employ a "pinch" collar. This does not change the above procedures in any way but makes the "jerk" correction more effective.

However, I prefer we try the above methods without the pinch collar for young puppies, and reserve the pinch collar for problem cases.

Remember, the key to most of the above is the stopping part. The dog must come to learn that they get where they want to go much faster by walking properly at your side, rather than forging ahead to get there.

And be patient! Do not expect immediate results. You are working to change a very natural, instinctive behavior for the dog, and that takes some time.