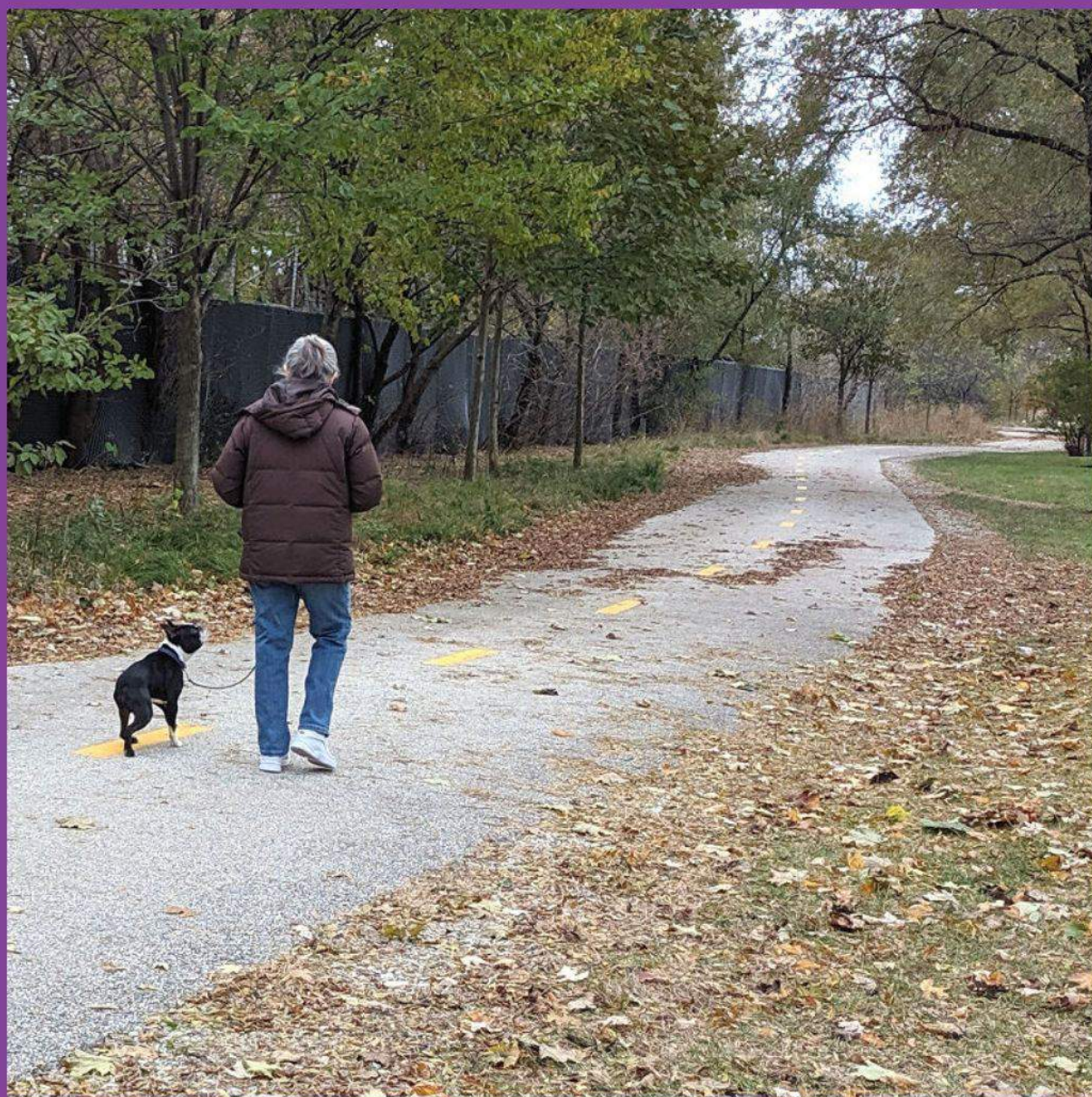


2-Minute Trainer: Let's Go For a Walk

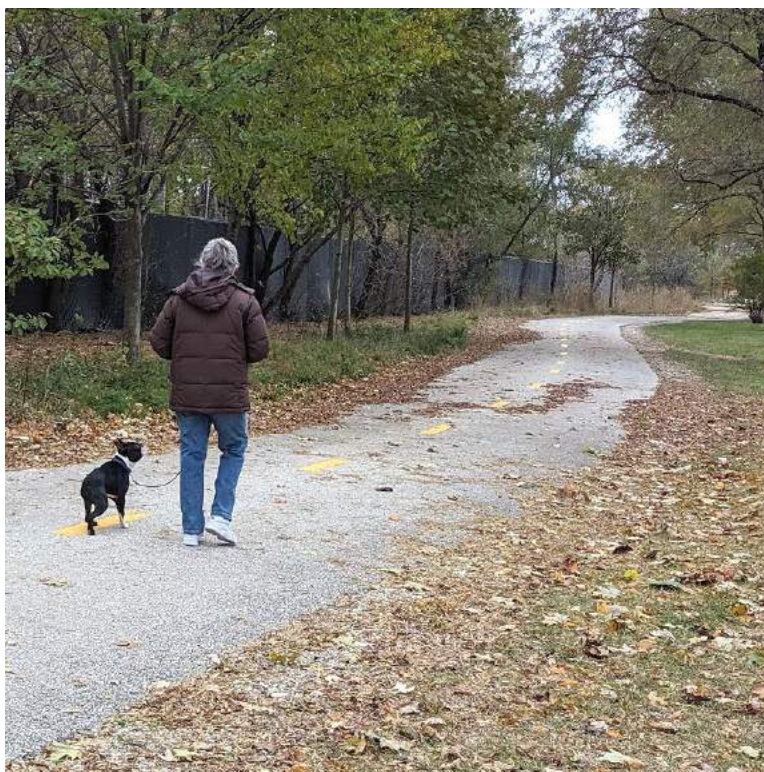


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ByGolly!
Publishing



2-Minute Trainer: Let's Go For a Walk



Hope Saidel
Fran Saidel

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2-Minute-Trainer #3

Let's Go For a Walk

Introduction

One of the **great pleasures** of having a dog is going for a walk. It's great to stroll the neighborhood after work, or dinner, just enjoying the evening and unwinding. You may prefer a longer outing - maybe enjoying nature at a forest preserve, or at a park, or beach. Wherever you live, there's beauty around to enjoy with your dog.

Studies have shown that **people who own dogs are generally in better shape**, mostly because our dogs need us to be active and take those walks. There are lots of reasons to take long walks with your dog. And a couple of huge ones that stop people from even trying.

Does your dog have delusions of **sled-dog life**? Does she seem to think that pulling you is the only way you'll get there? Have you ever been injured because your dog pulled too hard, or suddenly tugged away from you? We've heard stories of falls, dislocated shoulders, sprained knees, and tennis elbow. All because their dogs didn't "walk nice" on leash.

The **flip side isn't a whole lot better**. Does your dog just sit or lie down and refuse to go any farther? We've all seen "Funny Videos" of dogs, lying on their sides, dragged around home improvement stores or even down the sidewalk. Why won't the dogs get up and go?

And, possibly the most difficult, is your dog **so interested in the local wildlife** that he takes off running? We've had a couple of "hunters" in our life and understand how difficult it seems to reclaim your dog's attention once he's seen that rabbit take off across the neighbor's lawn.



Simon's not moving

Going against instinct

All dogs can be trained to “walk nice” on leash. Some will be easier to train than others. To a certain extent, we have to keep in mind what your dog’s particular breed was designed to do. If you have a sled-dog breed, that dog’s natural inclination is to pull. That’s what sled dogs do. If you have a terrier type, it was originally bred to hunt vermin independently. They chase bunnies.



We need work here. Pulling on the leash is not walking nicely...

So is your dog limited by his nature? Of course not! In one of our favorite old movies, *The African Queen*, (find it, it’s great!) Katherine Hepburn says to Humphrey Bogart: “Nature, Mr. Allnut, is what we are put in this world to rise above.”

You and your dog can lift whatever load nature has put on your team. **Like all training, it takes patience and consistency, and just 2-Minutes at a time.** You may not go very far, at first, but you will get there.

In the meantime

One of the difficulties with training polite on-leash walking is that you still have to walk your dog before he/she “gets” the concept. There has to be a **clear difference to your dog between “training walks” and “regular walks,” or even “potty walks.”** We know some dogs have to put on some miles before they can “do their business.”

An easy way to accomplish this is by having a collar or harness you only use for training. It may seem frivolous, but dogs do know. We have different collars for all of our dogs activities; obedience, agility, neighborhood outings, etc. And their behavior when we put on that collar indicates they know what it’s for, where we’re going, and which kind of fun we’re going to have.

Work to change

There's a saying "if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always gotten!" Lyricists say that love is the most powerful force in the universe. We disagree. It's habit.

Establishing a new habit takes a while - about 300 to 500 repetitions from what we hear. Breaking an old habit? Much harder. Between 3,000 and 5,000 repetitions. We have to make very conscious choices to change!

To start your training walks, **develop a new routine for yourself and your dog**. Use a new collar/harness and leash. Go out a different door, if you can. Change something so you and your dog are both aware that this is different, we're going to have some fun now.

What you'll need:

- Collar or harness
- 6-foot leash
- Treat bag

What **you don't need**:

- **Your phone.** If you have to have it with you, leave it in your pocket.

We're going to talk about the "stuff" a bit more here.

Collar or harness: We don't care. It doesn't matter. Whatever your dog is comfortable wearing is fine with us. Trainers who insist on one type of harness or collar are probably teaching you to use that tool instead of actually teaching the dog.

There are harnesses that reduce a dog's pulling while on lead. They all have one thing in common. Somehow, whether it's a "head halter" or "front-attach harness," or the strap-into-the-diaphragm harnesses; they make the dog uncomfortable somehow. That's negative reinforcement. The dog stops doing something to **avoid pain or discomfort**.

That's punishment. The dog does something and gets punished for it. Just because you aren't inflicting it directly doesn't mean it's not happening.

Same thing with “training,” “choke,” and “prong” collars. The dog pulls and chokes or stabs herself with the collar. Not what we’re trying to achieve.



2-Minute Tip

The whole idea of this journey is to have our dogs understand what we’re asking of them and choose to do it. Decades ago, the first trainer we ever worked with had a saying: “Never let a dog make a decision. It will always be the wrong one.”

Fortunately, times have changed and even this trainer, now a dear friend, has shifted to the positive side of the force. We’re teaching our dogs to make wonderful decisions - all by rewarding the good choices they make.

Leash:

Six feet is our favorite length. It’s long enough for our small dogs to have a little bit of room, but not so long that we can’t reel them in if necessary. If you have a taller dog, four feet would be fine. Shorter than that allows no room for the dog to make any decisions, so may not be ideal for training.

A word about retractable leashes: **Don’t use them for walking your dog - ever.** They’re dangerous for both you and your dog. We’ve seen dogs at the end of a retractable leash in the middle of the street, while the owner was paying no attention. We’ve seen people get “clotheslined” by them when the dog took off after a squirrel. We’ve seen stories of fingers cut, or even cut off, by them. The only possible use for a retractable leash is if you’re in a quiet area of a park and want to let your dog wander. If you choose to use one, we don’t want to hear about it.

Treats: Something easily manipulated while in motion. Cheerios are great. Honey Nut Cheerios are even better. Use your regular “trail mix” - as long as it’s a dry mix, you should be fine.

Treat bag: We like to use something designed for the purpose - most have either drawstrings or Velcro to keep them closed and the treats contained. If you don’t have one, a small fanny pack is fine. Or a nail apron from a hardware store makes an excellent treat bag. As long as it doesn’t move a lot, is easily accessible, and has a large enough opening so you can grab treats quickly.

Choose a side

Traditionally, heeling has always been on the left side. It's required in Obedience and Rally competition. Do you have to have your dog on the left? It's up to you - but you do have to **be consistent**. That "habit" thing will kick in for both of you in short order, so be aware of which side you choose.

We recommend the left side. When you know how much fun it is - for both you and your dog - doing "stuff" together, you may want to dip your toes into something like Rally for fun. And, as you know, it's really hard to break a habit. Choose left!

(Interesting historical tidbit: The tradition of having the dog on the left dates back centuries. Soldiers and hunters, even in Medieval times, had to have their right hands free for their weapons; swords, spears, arrows. Control of their animals, both horse and dog, was on the left. Now it lets you hold your phone.)



Reward with the hand
closest to the dog

Whichever side you choose - **always reward your dog with the hand on that side. Always!** If you reach across your body to feed your dog with the opposite hand, she's going to figure out where those treats are coming from really quickly. And she'll "help" you by crossing in front of you to get it. And you'll kick her, she'll trip you and you'll both wind up in a heap on the sidewalk. And that's not fun.

A word about our favorite training tool - the clicker

Once your dog knows what the clicker's about (Getting treats! Doing good!

Getting Treats! That's right! Treats!)

It's an amazing tool for letting your dog know it's doing exactly right. Using it when teaching loose-leash walking can be a challenge. Unless you're

better-coordinated than we are. It took a long time to get our mechanics right.

Assuming your dog will be walking on your left, your left hand should always be ready to reward your dog with a treat. Which means the leash is in your right hand. So no hands are devoted to the clicker.


By process of elimination, we use the clicker in our right hand. Because, more than once, we tried to feed it to our dog when the clicker was in the left hand. Fortunately, the dogs spit it out and waited for a proper reward.

If it seems too daunting at first, leave the clicker at home and use a happy “Yes!” to mark your dog’s good choices.

This Is Not Heeling

Keep in mind that the objective for these games isn’t “heeling.” Heeling is a very specific behavior for Rally and Obedience competition that requires the dog to be in a specific position throughout the exercise. To get a picture of the “heel” position - it’s “toes to bows” - the dog’s toes should be aligned with the bows of your shoelaces (if you’re wearing sneakers!). Heeling bears little or no resemblance to “going for a walk,” because the pace is regulated, the size of your steps depends on the dog, and all kinds of other stuff that you shouldn’t worry about when you just want to go for a nice walk with your dog. *If you’re interested in “heeling,” contact us and we’ll happily help you on your way!*

Note: Because “forging” or pulling ahead is so much more common, we talk about all of these games in that context. If your dog “lags” or is always behind you, it can be just as aggravating. And you can adapt all of these games to address the issue - just change “ahead” to “behind.”



Loose-leash Walking Games

Game #1: Red Light/Green Light

This game is just like the elementary school version. Except that **your dog signals “Red Light” by letting the leash tighten up!**

You may not get very far at all the first time you play this game. Not to worry. You’re laying the foundation of pleasant walks for the rest of your life with your dog!

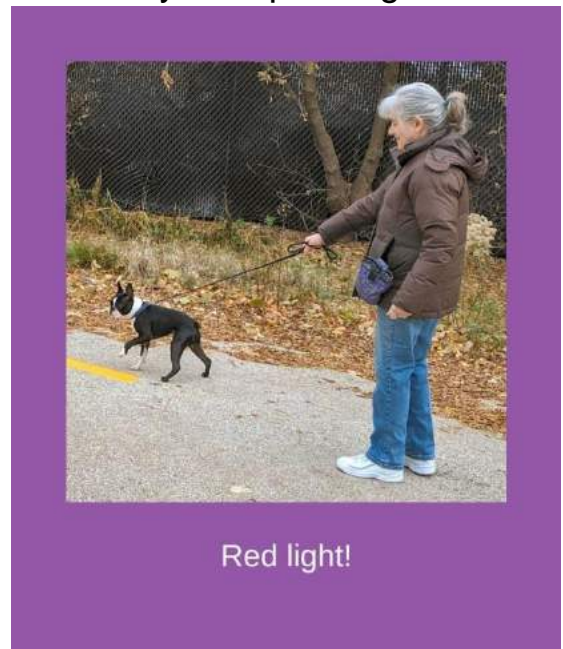
Start with your dog sitting next to you. The leash should be in your right hand, with a comfortable loop from your dog’s harness or collar to you. It shouldn’t hit the ground, but there should be a foot or two of slack between you. Rest your right hand, with the leash, comfortably around waist height. Everyone tends to start raising their leash hand when their dogs get a bit away from them. Try to keep your hand at waist level all the time.

Have a few treats in your left hand. If you have difficulty manipulating the treats, just keep one ready and your treat pouch on the left where you can reach into it quickly.

Tell your dog “Okay, let’s go!” and start walking. **You’re the “Green Light”** part of the game.

As soon as the leash gets taut, **your dog’s pulling out ahead, stop**. That’s your dog telling you “Red Light!”

When your dog looks at you, you can tell him or her “Good Fido!” but **only give the reward if he/she comes back a bit and the leash loosens up**. The first time you may just stand there for two minutes or until you call it quits. That’s okay. Your dog is trying to figure out what it is that you want. You can talk to your



dog, but try not to lure him back to you by showing him a treat. It will get the behavior, but your dog would be training you to bribe her to come back. Give your dog the opportunity to come up with the solution. You'll both be so proud of her when she does it!

The instant there's some slack in the leash, click or say "Yes!" and give your dog the treat. And give your "Green Light" signal - "Let's go!"

If your dog is in the habit of pulling, **it's going to take a few attempts before he/she gets the idea**. Habits are very difficult to break. And if you're outside practicing, there may be too many distractions (cars, airplanes, birds, squirrels) for your dog to solve the equation the first time. You can start teaching the game inside where there are fewer distractions, but you will have to move it outdoors. Remember, no matter how well your dog knows something in your usual training space, his/her ability to generalize it to another location will make it seem like you're starting over.

The first time Fran played this game with Simon, it took more than 5 minutes to get from the house to the public sidewalk, about 20 feet away. Yes, seriously. Lots of distractions: Grass! Leaves! A squirrel across the street! Cars going by! But eventually, not on that first try, or the second, Fran and Simon were able to walk down the street.



One step - stop.
He's getting it!

Game #2: The Wedding March

This game is particularly **good for teaching your dog to "sit" when you come to a stop**. When you reach a corner and have to check for traffic before crossing a street, it's great knowing your dog won't be forging out ahead and you don't have to worry about his safety.

We know that the step-halt, step-halt, step-halt cadence isn't really part of

weddings anymore, if it ever was. But calling this game the Wedding March tells you exactly what you should be doing!

With your dog at your side, take a step. Then stop. Wait for your dog to sit. Reward. Do it again! As many times as you can in the session.



2-Minute Tip: You can talk to your dog all you want - but don't issue any commands. This is your dog's time to figure things out. The more familiar your dog becomes with positive reinforcement training, the more things he or she will try to figure out what you want. We're not trying to "catch" our dogs doing the wrong thing - we're letting them learn the answers. For both dogs and

people, knowledge is retained better when we figure out the answer for ourselves, rather than having it handed to us.

You're providing a framework for your dog to problem-solve. It's to get your dog thinking: "Pulling isn't working, what else can I try?"

Many times it might be faster to lure your dog into behavior you want, whether it's a "sit" or even keeping a treat at the end of your dog's nose to keep her level with your walking pace. But to build long-term results and a dog who understands what's expected, you have to **let them choose the "good" thing to do.**

When your dog sits, celebrate! Give him a treat and tell him how smart, wonderful, and adorable he is. Then say "Let's go!" and take another step. Stop. We'll bet that the second time the sit comes faster. And faster every single time you try it.

When can you "ease up" on the rewards? Never. Every single time your dog does something good, acknowledge it! It doesn't always have to be food. A scratch behind the ears, a happy "good dog!," or "yes!," a little game of tug, are all rewards. You can certainly randomize delivery of treats as your dog shows that she knows the game. But **rewards should never be abandoned altogether.**

When some skill has been mastered, we all tend to start taking it for granted. We don't have to think about it every single time, so we may not even notice it. Until it starts to deteriorate.

Fortunately, sitting at halts is an easy behavior to establish - and regain if it happens to fall by the wayside. Dogs are not only smart and adaptable - they're also very forgiving. If you start forgetting to mark the sit when you halt, your dog will remind you by failing to do it!

You can **vary the elements of the Wedding March game:**

Take off at a run, then stop.

Vary the number of paces before stopping.

Take short little "baby steps."

Or giant steps!

All of these variations, and ones you come up with on your own, will **keep your dog's attention more closely on you** - "What's my crazy owner up to now?"

In our competition classes, our students are always amazed that their dogs often "heel" better and with more attention when the dogs aren't on leash. But if you think about it, it makes perfect sense. If the leash is tight (which it shouldn't be in competition, either!), the dog always knows exactly where you are. She doesn't have to look, or even glance. The pressure on the leash is constant information as to where you are and what you're doing. Once that umbilical is removed, the dog has to "check in" to see what's going on, where you are, and what's coming up.

Just as we have to pay attention to our dogs, **the dogs have to learn to keep an eye on us!**

Game #3: Wrongway Peachfuzz

If you remember the character from the Rocky and Bullwinkle show, Wrongway Peachfuzz was a completely incompetent sailor who was always going in the wrong direction. If you play this game right, your dog will think you're completely lost. He'll have no choice but to pay attention to you so he can figure out what's going on!

When you're out for a walk with your dog both of you should have a good time. It's an opportunity to spend a little time together, get moving and some exercise, see what's happening in the neighborhood, and just relax.



Wrong way!

If your dog's pulling, he's not paying attention to you. It's not nice, it's not fair, and it's rude. We're not going to ask for your dog's complete focus. **As long as she checks in with you regularly (glances your way), she's welcome to look around**, sniff, watch squirrels, whatever she wants. She just has to give you some respect!

With this game **we're reminding the dog to pay attention by changing direction**. When the leash gets tight, rather than stop, as in the previous game, turn around and go back the way you came. You can say your dog's

name, but don't stop. Try to maintain the same pace. When your dog catches up to you, reward!

When the dog settles in to the new direction, chances are he'll start pulling again. Change direction. If you're someplace you can, make a left or right turn rather than retracing your path. **The less predictable you are, the more your dog has to pay attention to stay with you**. The objective here is to keep your dog focused on you. Dogs have wonderful peripheral vision, so as long as they're roughly even with you, they can see what you're doing.

You can signal your intention to change direction by saying your dog's name or something like "Here we go!" or "This way!" **Try not to use "watch me!"** That command is mostly used for face-to-face attention exercises and we'll be using it for other training. Whatever phrase you want to use is fine - its meaning is between you and your dog. One of the many, many nice things about dogs is that **we can make up our own ways to communicate with them**.

For example: There's an exercise in Obedience competition where you send your dog all the way across the room by himself. It's called the "Go Out" in the rules, and most people just say "Go Out!" to their dogs. We have a friend who used "Energize!" It makes everyone who hears it smile. Gotta love a Star Trek fan!

Many people may feel embarrassed or shy about talking to their dogs. Try to get over it. These days, regardless of whether your phone or ear buds are visible, anyone seeing you will think you're on the phone. Not to mention that most people would be watching your dog, not you, anyway!

You may only get a couple of steps before you have to change direction. That's okay. Just don't get dizzy, don't get tangled in the leash, and try not to tangle your dog. This is another case where it's important that your dog stays on her side of the road - anything else will land both of you in trouble, and possibly in Urgent Care.

Because this is a **fast, intense exercise**, stick to the 2-Minute timing. Choose a different game if you have a little more time on a given day. During these two minutes, you may do a lot of turning without many steps between, so it's possible to lose your balance. Remember to look up, refocus, and call a halt if you're getting unsteady. Looking down or across at your dog isn't the same as normal walking - it's easy to lose your equilibrium, so be careful.

Dogs learn through the timing and placement of rewards. Reward right away when your dog appears at your side. And keep the reward by your side. Don't reach back or forward. Let the dog come to you. As for placement, try to reward by the side of your leg. Keep your hand by your pants' seam. In short order, your dog will know where to go for the treats.

Game #4: Speed Racer

Same stuff: dog on collar or harness and leash, treats, and you!

This is another game to play to focus your dog's attention on you. It's not that we want them staring at us adoringly all through our walks together. It's

that we want them to know where we are and what we're doing. "Checking in" is fine.

Set off at your regular walking pace. Then, **randomly, change pace.** Faster or slower, it doesn't matter. Make it a noticeable change, though. Either take off running with a "Let's go!" or slow to a virtual crawl, with a "stay with me, pup!"

Yes, your dog may think you've lost your mind. **The less predictable you are, the more your dog will choose to look at you** and see what the heck you're up to. If you always go the same route, at the same pace, at the same time, your dog knows exactly what's coming and has no reason to focus on you at all.

Dogs love routine, so your dog may not be crazy about this. They like schedules and going the same way. If you walk with your dog regularly, you've probably been amused by how your dog knows which corners to turn, which neighbors' houses have dogs to look for, and even when it's time to go home. And of course your dog turns into the right property every time.



2-Minute Tip: We're taking advantage of this natural love for habit to change your dog's behavior. Remember Einstein's definition of insanity? Expecting a different result when you do the same thing the same way. Do something different and you may get a new outcome!

This game is **especially useful if your route options are limited.** We recommend alerting your dog to the change of pace so he/she has the opportunity to change with you. If possible, change the pace before the leash gets tight to avoid choking your dog or putting sudden pressure on him. You can certainly wiggle the leash a little with your hand if you're having trouble getting your dog to pay attention to you. Another non-punishing way to get your dog to look at you is to blow on his/her head.

The change of pace doesn't have to be for very long - you don't have to jog a mile. Just a few steps will do. Then signal another pace change. Reward at the side seam of your pants whenever your pup meets your eyes. You're not only having a fun walk, you're letting your dog know he/she is being good for staying with you.

Remember to **reward whenever possible**. When dogs are first learning something new, or especially when they're changing an established habit, we have to tell them they're doing good. The more often the dog is rewarded for a behavior, the more likely they'll repeat it.

Game #5: Behind you!

This is a terrific game for dogs that are toy, rather than treat, motivated. If you want to play it with treats, you may need to change them this game, since you won't be delivering it into your dog's mouth. It should be something big enough that your dog can see it on the ground and, if you can, a contrasting color to the surface you'll be walking on.

Start off as usual. When the leash gets taut, **drop the treat or toy slightly in front of your feet**. Stop walking and say something like "look!" or "You missed it!" and wait for your dog to find the reward. If it's a toy, play tug for a few seconds before you resume your walk. Ask your dog to drop the toy (reward for that, too!) and resume walking. If you're using treats, wait for your dog to look at your face, reward, and continue walking.



Enjoying a nice walk.

This is another game where you may not get anywhere fast. It's okay. We're teaching our dogs that all good things come from being with us. And paying attention to us will always make good things happen.

Conclusion

Because we're effecting change gradually, you may not notice day-to-day progress. Try to get video of where you are when you start, and at least once a week. You'll see the change when you watch the video - how much more your dog looks at you. How much farther you get before the pulling starts. How much more relaxing walking with your dog is. And how much you're both enjoying walking as time goes by.