



Teaching a Gentle Leash

The challenge of dogs pulling on lead is that it's normal for vertebrates such as dogs and people to respond to pressure with equal pressure. In this way we inadvertently create a tug of war where every time the dog pulls we pull back, and vice versa.

The "Gentle Leash" approach teaches your dog that the leash provides meaningful, nuanced, signals, and it helps you to develop a light hand on the leash when signaling. It is based loosely on Shirley Chong's "Silky Leash", a fabulous technique for turning the leash into a signaling device: <http://www.shirleychong.com/keepers/LLW>.

Your dog should be wearing a flat collar, martingale collar, back-clip harness, or head halter.

Introduce the Concept:

- Begin in a low-distraction environment.
- Clip the leash to your dog's collar, harness, or head halter.
- Hold the leash with your pinky finger, about 8-12 inches away from the clip.

Step #1

- Using your pinky finger, place a tiny bit of pressure on the leash to the right side.
- When your dog moves his head the tiniest bit in the direction of the pressure, click or say "yes", release the pressure on the leash, and feed a treat.
- Repeat five times.

Step #2

- Using your pinky finger, place a tiny bit of pressure on the leash to the left side.
- When your dog moves his head the tiniest bit in the direction of the pressure, click or say "yes", release the pressure on the leash, and feed a treat.
- Repeat five times.

Step #3

- Using your pinky finger, place a tiny bit of pressure on the leash to the left or right side, mixing up the direction of pressure (left or right) randomly.
- When your dog moves his head the tiniest bit in the direction of the pressure, click or say "yes", release the pressure on the leash, and feed a treat.
- Repeat seven times.

Avoid Trouble:

- Keep your training sessions short—a few minutes each.
- Have play breaks between sets. A game of tug, or time with a food puzzle, will go a long way to keeping up your dog's enthusiasm.

- Keep your pressure on the leash VERY light—pinky finger only! We're teaching our dogs a signal, so that they choose to move. We're not forcing them to move.

Raise the Bar:

We want to increase the difficulty level ever so gradually, so that we never trigger the oppositional response. With this in mind, repeat steps #1 through #3 with these incremental variations:

Variation A, Distance:

In this variation you slowly increase the amount of movement that your dog offers in response to the leash signal.

1. Wait for your dog to move his head a little bit further before you click:
 - i. 1 inch
 - ii. 2 inches
 - iii. 3 inches
 - iv. etc.
2. Wait for your dog to move his body a little bit:
 - i. A shift of weight
 - ii. A tiny step
 - iii. A larger step or a couple of tiny steps
 - iv. etc.

Variation B, Duration:

In this variation you increase the amount of time that your dog comfortably moves in response to the leash signal.

1. Wait for your dog to move for a full second before clicking.
2. Wait for your dog to move for two full seconds before clicking.
3. Wait for your dog to move for three full seconds before clicking.
4. etc.

Variation C, Difficulty:

In this variation you raise the distraction level in the environment, starting with tiny increases. Here are some examples.

1. Practice in a larger room or space.
2. Practice just inside your back door. If the door is not see-through, open the door so that your dog can see outside, but work at a sufficient distance from the back door that he can respond thoughtfully to your leash signals.
3. Have a family member walk by at a distance as you continue training.
4. Practice just outside your back door.
5. Have a family member walk by at a distance while carrying a toy.
6. etc.

Final Thoughts:

- Use great treats to motivate your dog.
- If your dog is struggling, go back a few steps and raise the bar more slowly.
- It bears repeating: keep your sessions to a few minutes each.