



DOG TRAINING SOLUTIONS

Leash Problems

Exercise is a major part of our dogs' lives. Cesar Millan, the "Dog Whisperer", tells us that to maintain a healthy relationship with our beloved pooches, that relationship should consist of 50% physical exercise, 25% discipline, and 25% affection. That's a lot of exercise!

In order for us to be able to enjoy exercising our dogs as much as they need, it's important for them to behave well both on the lead. Unfortunately, there are many dogs out there who are afraid of the leash itself – resulting in neurotic, fearful, submissive behaviour whenever the lead comes out.

In this newsletter, we'll take a look at the most effective way to deal with fear of the leash.

FEAR OF THE LEASH

The majority of the time, the sight of the leash is enough to bring on a fit of joy – the dog knows that leash = walk, and reacts accordingly.

For some dogs, though, the leash connotes fear and submissiveness more than anything else. Perhaps the leash was used in a negative way with a previous owner – as a tool for dragging the dog around. Perhaps it was used to confine the dog for long hours at a time. In some extreme cases, dogs have even been whipped with the leash as punishment. Or perhaps your dog is just very highly strung, and is prone to developing phobias seemingly arbitrarily.

Although fear of the leash can have a severely negative impact on your walks with your dog, the good news is that it's easy to cure. You just need some patience and some basic equipment.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

- A leash, made of webbing or leather. Approximately 5 feet (1.25 meters) is a good length, as it enables control without risk of the dog getting tangled in the leash when out walking. Chain-link leashes aren't recommended, as they're hard on the hands – and also can flick the dog in the face, which isn't something you'd want to inflict on any dog, let alone one that's suffering from fear of the leash!
- A good-quality collar, again made of leather or nylon webbing. If you're using one with a snap-lock, make sure it's safety-approved and won't come undone under pressure. Slip-chain collars (also known as 'choke-chains' or 'check-chains') should never be used on an unattended dog, as they're a training tool, not a real collar¹.
- A little bit of time, and a little bit of patience.

WHAT TO DO:

- Your aim here is to accustom your dog to the lead a little bit at a time, keeping him well within his comfort zone at each step of the way. Because

¹ DogTraining Solutions does not recommend any harsh training tools at any time

he's already got a fear of the leash, some discomfort in its presence is to be expected, but watch out for signs of extreme fear: hyperventilating, drooling, submissive urination, rolling eyes (often showing the whites).

- So step one: remember to take baby steps at all times!
 - If he's really afraid of the leash, you'll need to accustom him to it very slowly indeed. Practice leaving it out in full view, preferably in 'fun' places: next to his food bowl, in preferred play areas, near his bed.
 - Once he's stopped reacting to the sight of it, introduce the leash to him in a more active manner. You can do this by wrapping it around your hand as you pet and groom him. Hold the leash in your hand as you prepare his food; sit by him and stroke him, with the leash wrapped around your hand, as he eats. Keep this up until he's stopped showing any signs of discomfort – it may take some time, but remember that you're aiming to accustom him comfortably to the leash. Any rushing is counterproductive.
 - When he's not showing any signs of nervousness with this level of progress, you can start attaching the leash to his collar. Put him in a sit-stay, using a firm, calm voice, and clip the leash on. Don't make a big deal out of it: your dog will take his emotional and psychological cues from your behaviour. If you act as though it's not a big deal, he'll follow your lead.
 - Once the leash is on, give him some time to get used to the sensation of something hanging off his neck. He may get a little panicky at this stage, and start pawing at his neck and trying to rub the leash off along the ground. If he's showing signs of nervousness, distract him with a game: a short game of tug-o'-war (providing he knows to drop the toy when you've had enough) is a good idea; if he can run without getting tangled in the leash, play a short game of fetch; or, if the two of you are outside in a safely enclosed area, you can go for a short walk. Don't attempt to touch the leash at this stage, just let him walk around freely.
 - Take the leash off after five minutes or so, and praise him lavishly for being such a good boy. Give him a couple of small, tasty treats, and lots of petting.
 - Repeat these last three steps several more times before progressing to the next level: you want to give him plenty of opportunities to get used to the sensation of the leash itself before you start using it to control his walking. The more positive associations he forms with the leash (which he will do through the games, walks, and treats while wearing it), the better for his progress.
 - Next, it's time for a short obedience-training session while he's wearing the leash. Five minutes is plenty: practice a sit-stay and the recall command ("come") while he's wearing the leash. This will reinforce your authority and leadership, and remind him that he's still expected to obey you while wearing the leash.
 - When he's readily obeying your commands with the leash on, you can take him for a short walk while he's wearing it. If he's jumpy, do not reinforce his nervousness by rewarding him with attention. Simply ignore him and carry on walking. Remember, he takes his cues from you, so keep calm and wait for it to pass.
 - If, at any point, you feel that he's simply too nervous to proceed (for example, if he's still panicking after three or four minutes of walking on the leash), go back to the level at which he was last 100% comfortable. Wait a few days at this stage before attempting to proceed.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Remember to be patient! Don't attempt to rush your dog's progress: using force is

counterproductive to your end goal. You're teaching him to relax and be calm around the leash – if you get stressed or frustrated with his lack of progress, he'll be able to tell, and his anxiety levels will increase, not decrease.

- Remember not to indulge his nervousness or coddle him if he plays up or gets nervous. If you react to his crying and trembling with petting and cooing, you are telling him that it's OK to feel like that. If he's nervous, either ignore it and carry on, or distract him with a game or short walk. If he's still panic-stricken after three or four minutes, revert to the previous step and give it more time.

- This should go without saying, but never correct or punish him for skittishness or nervous behaviour – again, it's counterproductive in the extreme.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information on a variety of leash-related problems, as well as a detailed look at the whole spectrum of common canine behavioural problems, you may want to check out SitStayFetch. It's a comprehensive training compendium for the responsible owner, and covers just about every topic you could ever need for building and maintaining a happy, healthy relationship with your dog.

You can check out the SitStayFetch site by clicking on the link below:

<http://www.kingdomofpets.com/dogobediencetraining/index.php?aff=cbdtsol608&type=leash>