

Texas Veterinary Behavior Services

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Long-Line Walks

Long-line walks are a great opportunity to bond with your dog, practice certain training exercises, and increase your dog's aerobic exercise. We encourage you to take your dog on long-line walks to allow her to "be a dog" (run, roll in the grass, and sniff captivating scents) in a safe, enriching environment. During long-line walks you will also work on teaching your dog "come," "this way," "easy," and a release word. (For simplicity, the pronouns "she/her" are used throughout this handout to refer to your dog.)

Items Needed

- 20-50 foot, cotton long-line (We do not recommend using a retractable leash.)
- Body Harness. You will attach the long-line to her harness so she does not injure her neck if she runs to the end of the line quickly.
- Large, open area (i.e. field; retention pond; bayou). This area should be devoid of people and other dogs if she has a reactivity issue with these stimuli.
- Reinforcement. You will need high-value reinforcers for these walks – ideally things more valuable to her than the distracting sights, sounds, and scents you will encounter on the walks.
 - Toys are good when training active behaviors such as "come" or "heel."
 - Use food when first teaching a new behavior.

Tips on handling the leash: Do not worry about holding the entire length of the line in your hands during the walk. We do not want the leash handling to distract you from the training. Focus on controlling the part of the line that runs between her harness and your hand. Let the rest of the leash trail on the ground behind you.

Hold the line loosely in one hand so that it can smoothly glide through your hand (without giving you rope burn) when you want to allow her to move further away from you. Any time she approaches toward you, take up the excess line between you and the dog and let it trail behind you.

How the Walk Works

You set the pace and direction of the walk. You also control the length of leash given to the dog. Within this radius, she is

Glossary of Cues/Behaviors

This Way—The dog should follow in the direction you are walking.

Easy—A warning to your dog that she should slow down or stop because she is about to reach the end of the line.

Come—The dog should come directly to you, stop and wait with you until released.

Release Word—releases your dog from any previous cue or behavior – it tells her that she can go off and do what she wants.

allowed to do essentially anything she wants as long as she does not pull on the leash.

When you walk off, or when you change directions, first cue the dog by telling her “This Way.” Walk off promptly in the direction you have chosen. If she hesitates after the cue, anchor your hand at your side and continue walking purposefully in your chosen direction. If you hesitate or wait for the dog, you will teach her to ignore your cue to walk off with you. When she does readily move with you (without pressure on the line), praise and reward her with a treat.

As you are walking along, give your warning cue (e.g. “easy”) before she is about to reach the end of the line. After you give the warning, close your hand around the line to prevent her from moving further away.

Periodically throughout the walk, you want to practice calling your dog to you. Stand still and face her. Say “come.” As soon as she turns toward you, begin to praise and extend your hand out with her favorite reward. As long as she continues toward you, continue praising. Let her have the reward as soon as she reaches you.

If your dog does not come to you immediately, anchor your hand at your side and walk steadily backward away from her. This will slowly pull her away from the distraction. When she is far enough away from the distraction, she will likely turn toward you. When she does start to move toward you, verbally praise her and reward her as soon as she gets to you. If she runs past you instead of coming directly to you, turn toward her and again repeat the “come” cue. Begin backing away from her. Repeat this process until she comes directly to you and stops.

Once she is in front of you, she should remain there until you specifically release her to go play again. Ideally, she should make eye contact with you before you give the release cue. Train your dog a release word (e.g. “okay,” “all done,” “free”). If she tries to run away before you cue the release word, use the leash to stop her movement.

Cautionary Tips

- Insure that the long line is not wrapped around any part of your dog’s body so she does not become entangled or rope burned.
- Insure that the long line is not wrapped around any part of your body!
- Be mindful of your environment: Do not give your dog enough line that she could get far enough away from you to get into a dangerous situation (e.g. out into a street).