

Taking Walks Without Worry!

A practical guide to helping decrease stress for you and your pup!

Please visit my website for helpful pictures, videos and links!

1. Choose an appropriate time and place

Find a time of day (early, late, midday etc) that is quiet so that you will be less likely to encounter other people, dogs and triggers (trucks, skateboards, bikes etc). You could also drive to the neighborhood cemetery for exercise as these are often quiet and unoccupied.

2. Choose the right tools

Ditch the chokers, pinch collars and e-collars and choose a **freedom harness** or **gentle leader** for comfortable, pain free control. These tools help you quickly re-direct your dog's body and attention towards you without causing fear or discomfort.

3. Always carry a treat buffet in your fanny pack (great for keys, poop bags, and clickers too!)

Any treat you give should be the size of a green pea. You can use fresh meats and cheese for high value treats, freeze dried liver for moderate value treats, and dry cat treats or kibble for lower value treats. If you give many treats in a day, you may want to consider slightly cutting back on your dog's kibble portion for the day to prevent excessive weight gain.

4. Be aware of your surroundings and prevent mistakes

Prevent your dog from being in a situation where you know she will react. This means that your dog should not be in situations where she exceed her threshold (meaning she will whine, bark, lunge or growl). As soon as you notice that your pup is very focused on the trigger and is less interested in treats, perform an emergency U-turn to create space between your dog and the trigger.

5. Emergency U-Turns

Always carry a small baby food jar smeared with yummy food (peanut butter, braunschweiger, cream cheese etc) so that you can perform emergency "U-Turns" when you notice your pup approaching her threshold (focused staring, taking treats harder or not at all, tension on leash). Place the jar an inch in front of her nose and once she starts licking, gently guide her in a 180 degree turn away from the trigger or up into a driveway to hide behind a car or shrub until the trigger passes. Your dog should remain eating the entire time.

6. Stay upbeat and calm

Keeping a calm and relaxed attitude will help you and your pup! Try to keep the leash loose and avoid transferring tension when you get nervous. You can also talk to your pup and let

her know that passing the trigger is no big deal. A “what a good girl, you’re doing so great!” can go a long way.

7. Loose leash walking: be consistent!

When you allow your dog to pull towards a squirrel or good smell, you are rewarding the pulling behavior. Try to only move forward when the leash is loose. If it becomes taught, stop and wait for your dog to take a step back or look back towards you and then allow them to move forward again. You can reward them for loose leash walking by saying “go sniff” and allowing them to sniff a bush or by giving them a treat. Reward eye contact with treats especially when there are distractions present.

8. Change fear and anxiety to calm and happy behavior

If your dog is anxious or fearful, it is important to change her underlying emotions about the triggers. When you’re up for a training sessions, play the Engage/Disengage Game. Step one: click and treat for looking at the trigger then graduate to step 2: click and treat for looking away from the trigger and towards you. Please see the detailed handout/image online.

9. Provide physical and mental enrichment outside of walks

Feeding meals from food puzzles, playing fetch or tug, and other games are a fantastic way to do this so that you and your pup are not solely relying on walks for all exercise, especially while you are in training and unable to take as many walks as you would like.

10. Start training a cue for voluntary eye contact

Start at home in an easy and distraction free room. Click/treat each time your pup looks towards your face and slowly increase expectations to eventually require a several second look directly at your face. You can then add the cue word “look” and start practicing in more challenging environments. Please see my clicker training 101 handout for tips and videos to help you and your dog learn together! Avoid using the “look” cue until you can bet \$100 your dog will perform the correct behavior. Instead, reward your dog with a tasty treat when she offers voluntary eye contact on walks.

The process of learning to walk loosely on leash and not react to triggers is a long process that can takes months to years.

Be patient and remember to always have **FUN!**

Controlled Practice Sessions

Once you have worked through the above steps you can consider practicing the above techniques with another calm, friendly, and predictable dog, preferably one who your dog already knows and is friends with.

When choosing a human/dog pair to practice with always choose a friend/family member who will follow your rules EXACTLY (e.g. staying 3 houses away at all times, not trying to look back and talk to you etc) and a dog who walks loosely on leash and does not whine or try to say "hi" or make eye contact with your dog (eye contact can be threatening to your dog and will likely make practicing too difficult).

If you have a pup who is reactive on leash and you would like some guidance, please give me a call to set up an appointment or check out my website (<https://www.petsandpeopleinharmony.com/trainers-and-tools/>) for helpful tips and tricks.

There are many trainers who have classes just for reactive dogs to help you safely work through this challenging issue with your pup. My favorite trainers are listed on the website listed above.

Remember that's is always better to go too slowly than trying to progress too quickly and making mistakes that set you and your pup back to square one.

Most importantly, ALWAYS HAVE FUN!