Dumb Friends League®
COMPASSION ALWAYS

Dog Walking Basics

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Understanding Animal Body Postures - Dogs

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The ability to read and understand animal body postures is important so you can:

- Avoid being bitten
- Identify stressed animals
- Avoid stressing or inadvertently challenging animals
- Evaluate animal interactions for the purposes of kenneling together, placement in the same home, play group assignments, etc.

Remember that in both dogs and cats, there are variations in body parts among breeds (cropped ears, curly tails, flat faces) that can make correct interpretation of body postures difficult for people and animals alike.

Dog Postures

Dogs may display postures that invite approach or postures that warn others away.

Postures that the dog uses to say, "I don't mind if you come closer":

- Avoiding eye contact
- Submissive grin
- Ears held back softly against head
- Lowering of the body
- Loose wagging of the tail
- Lip licking or tongue flicking
- Relaxation of the body's muscles
- Rolling onto back, exposing belly

Postures that the dog uses to say, "stay away from me":

- Maintaining eye contact
- Snarling/baring teeth
- Ears held erect and forward / or held tensely against head
- Piloerection (hackles up)
- Tensing of muscles
- Marking (urination or ground scratching)
- Stiffly wagging tail held vertically or arched over the back

Assertive aggressive postures that the dog uses to say, "I'm in charge here":

- Stalking behavior (head and tail down, ears erect and back arched)
- Perpendicular posture – when a dog stands with his head and neck over the another dog's neck or shoulders in a "T" position
- Stiff-legged gait and arched neck with tail held high or wagging stiffly

Fearful postures that the dog uses to say, "I'm frightened and may defend myself if necessary":

- Crouching, retreating, hiding, trying to make himself smaller
- Tucked tail
- Ears held flat against head
- Urination/defecation
- Standing silently, gazing off
- Freezing (muscle tension)
- Snarling with teeth visible

A note about tails

Tail posturing is the canine signal most often misinterpreted by humans. It is possible that tail movement conveys olfactory cues unperceivable by us "scent-deprived" humans. In general:

- A tail held motionless below the horizon indicates submission, passivity, or uncertainty.
- A tail tucked between the legs indicates extreme submission or anxiety.
- A tail held above the horizon or arched over the back indicates confidence.
- A loosely wagging tail (with no tension in the muscles of the body) held below the horizon is usually the sign of a friendly dog.

It is important to remember that tail position must be interpreted along with other body signals and in the context of the interaction.

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Safe Handling of Dogs in the Shelter

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These reminders are intended to support, not replace, an animal handling training session.

GETTING THE DOG

- Talk to the dog calmly and softly.
- Remember that shelter dogs do not know or trust you, regardless of how friendly they seem. Actions such as bending over them to put on a leash, or even just reaching out to pet them on top of the head may be perceived as threatening to the dog, even if you don't intend them to be.
- Don't rush. The calmer and quieter you are, the calmer the dog will be.
- Distract the dogs away from the gate by tossing a treat into the kennel as far away from you as possible (against the glass is best, so that it makes a noise). Slip inside, close the gate behind you and walk all the way into the kennel. Have your leash ready.
- While leashing the dog, try not to intimidate him by standing over him or tossing the "noose" end of the lead at his head.
- Don't go in after any dog that is under a bench or is cowering. Wait for him to come out on his own or ask a supervisor for help.
- Don't press your luck: If you feel uncomfortable removing the dog from its kennel, tell your supervisor.
- If the dog's kennel mate is making your job too difficult, put him in a cut-off beside the kennel area. If you don't need to remove the other dog, distract him again by tossing a treat toward the glass; let your leashed dog go through the gate's gap ahead you. Slide out of the kennel and close the door quickly behind you.
- Keep the dog you are walking away from other kennels. If you encounter another person and dog, move aside into a cut-off or turn and go the other way. Breaking the line of vision between two dogs always helps.
- If the dog won't walk on leash, try coaxing him by moving in front and down low, using your voice and treats to encourage him. Dragging a dog is never permitted.
- Don't carry the dog unless it is small. Then, only carry the dog or pup as you would a cat- controlling the neck and head at all times.

IN AN ADOPTIONS VISITING ROOM

- Hang onto the leash, encouraging the patron(s) to introduce themselves to the dog. If the dog is more interested in you than the patron, let the patron offer the dog a treat from a flat hand.
- Allow the dog to have his preferences - whether he wants to visit with patrons, stay near you, lie down or investigate the room.
- Explain to the patron(s) the need for slow movements and calm voices. Encourage them to remain seated. Be ready to "rescue" the dog from young children or to rescue the patron(s) from a bouncing, out-of-control dog.

- Always have a leash handy in case you need it.
- If possible and/or if you feel the need, stay with the patrons in the visiting room. You can gather valuable info (about the dog and the patron) in addition to what you've already learned. You can also act as an "interpreter" to help the patron understand how the dog is reacting to the situation. Always feel free to ask a supervisor, or behavior staff member for help if needed.
- React quickly if you think the dog may begin acting aggressively due to over stimulation or fear in the visiting room. Get the dog safely out of the room and into a secure area and tell your supervisor.

PROPER USE OF BAIT IN THE SHELTER

- Distraction (getting in/out of kennels, separating dogs)
- Bribery (coaxing unmovable dogs to walk)
- Focusing attention (encouraging the dog to look at your face while walking or examining)
- Training (reinforcement for desired behavior)

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Approaching Fearful Animals In The Shelter Environment

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When approaching a fearful animal, you should make every effort to be as non-threatening as possible. Remember that a caged animal may not show you signs of fear until it feels cornered (i.e. when you close off the only visible exit path). The shelter environment is stressful and animals under stress are unpredictable. Adhering to the following guidelines will help to reduce the likelihood of dangerous situations.

- **Remember that the shelter animals do not know or trust you**, regardless of how friendly they seem. Actions such as putting a leash on, reaching out over his head to pet him, or hugging an animal can be perceived as threatening even if you don't intend for them to be.

- **Keep an eye on what the animal is doing but do not stare intently at it.** While you obviously need to watch where you are going and pay attention to an animal's body posture, direct eye contact is very intimidating and threatening.

- **Get the animal's attention before you open its kennel gate and use body language to convey that you are not a threat.** Even if you are not a very large person, you are taller than the animal and may seem to loom over it. Crouch down and turn the side of your body towards the animal while offering your open hand, rather than approaching head-on. You can also kneel or sit on the floor but you should be stable in whatever position you choose. (When working with animals in cages, try to bring your hand in from the bottom, rather than the top, of the cage.)

- **Do not reach over the animal's head.** Reach out and touch under the chest or chin, or behind and under the ears, rather than over the head. Allow the animal to sniff your fingers first if he wants to investigate you. (Cats will generally "tell" you where they prefer to be petted by approaching your hand with that part of their body.)

- **Move slowly and deliberately.** Quick, sudden, or tentative movements may produce more fearful reactions. Be sure that the animal is aware of your presence.

- **Use treats and praise instead of force to coax the animal into approaching.** Offer treats with an open palm and do not hold food between the fingers.

- **Do not attempt to catch loose animals as they are running past you.** Many times, cats loose on the floor or dogs running loose in a hallway are in a state of panic and looking for an escape route or hiding place. Grabbing a cat off of the floor or suddenly taking a dog by the collar can cause a bite. Instead, let the animal be and close off doors and escape routes to confine it, then get help from an experienced staff member.

When in doubt, DON'T!

Dogs and Stairs

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Some shelter dogs will walk fine on a leash until you approach a staircase. Many of the dogs the League receives have never seen stairs and will display fear by refusing to climb or descend. Others may bolt up or down the stairs ahead of you, making an unsafe situation for you.

Points To Consider

- How much time do you have?
  - If you can, take your time and work with the dog. It will help the dog and the next person that has to walk him! Rushing a dog will only make the stairs more threatening and the situation less safe.
- Where are you going?
  - There are several different routes to most places in the League's buildings. If you are in a hurry, chances are that you may be able to find a way to your destination without using stairs at all. Also, there are several different types of staircases in our buildings. Some of them have a "dead end" look and are more intimidating to dogs than others.

Best Bets

- For a dog that is bolting up or down the stairs ahead of you:
  - Use the hand railing.
  - Make sure you are using a safe leash handling technique.
  - Go slowly- try taking a few steps at a time. When the dog pulls, stop moving and wait until he releases the leash tension before you move again. This keeps things calm and under control while teaching the dog that it cannot proceed up or down stairs unless the leash is slack.
- For a dog that is afraid to move up or down the stairs:
  - Go two or three stair-steps in front of the dog, get down low, loosen that leash, and encourage the dog to go just that far. Use sweet talk, big smiles, and smelly treats.
  - Make the goal more interesting and less threatening. If there is a closed door at the bottom (or top) of that staircase, open it. Put another person there to do happy, tempting things (smile, talk, offer treats), but don't block the opening of the door. Ditto if there is a blank wall at a landing between flights.
  - Think about what the dog is seeing and hearing. Moving to an area with less noise and chaos can also help if you would like to work with the dog.
- Carrying a dog up or down stairs is threatening and dangerous. This is a last resort and should only be done by an experienced staff member while assisted.

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Leash Techniques for Dogs

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- Loop the "handle" of the leash over your thumb, passing the leash across your closed palm so that you are holding the leash as if it were a video game joystick. An alternative is to loop the handle over all four fingers and then into your palm. Either method makes the most of the muscles in your hand and arm. DON'T wrap the leash around your hand.

- Dogs should NEVER be walked on two nylon slip leads tied together.

- Shorten the leash to keep the dog close to you. On a longer lead, you have less control because the dog can gain more power and momentum. A shorter leash can also help keep the dog's attention on you.

- Bend your elbows! A bent arm helps absorb shock should the dog lunge suddenly. A bent arm also gets the dog closer to you, and therefore easier to control. Need more help? Grab the leash about halfway down with your other hand -- and bend that elbow, too.

- To help distribute the strain of a bouncy, powerful dog lunging forward, widen your stance, grab the leash in both hands (see above), and take shorter steps.

- Use distractions like tiny pieces of treats, "happy talk," etc. to keep the dog's focus on you.

- Remember, very few dogs in the shelter are going to walk on a loose leash for you. Our goal is safety, not obedience!

Getting Started with the Clicker

The easiest way to start clicker training is to teach your dog to hand target. During this process your dog will learn that the click sound ALWAYS means a treat is coming, and he'll learn that offering a specific behavior earns a click/treat. This will become the foundation for teaching all sorts of new behaviors.

What you need:

- A clicker
- Tasty, soft, bite-sized treats – try hot dogs, cheese, chicken, or beef cut into 1/4 inch cubes. Place about 15-20 treats in a small bowl
- A quiet place with no distractions that has a table or counter on which you can place the treat bowl so that it is too high for the dog to reach.

Step one: Practicing without the dog

Without your dog around, practice clicking and transferring one food treat from the treat bowl to an empty bowl. This may seem a little silly, but clicker training involves mechanical skills and you want to get familiar with the "equipment" and the rhythm of the clicker game.

So, click **once** (the click is a quick two-beat sound), and deliver a treat from one bowl to another. Repeat until this feels comfortable and natural. When you see the abbreviation C/T, this is what you will do, only you'll deliver the treat to the dog.

Step two: "Charging" the clicker

Now bring your dog into the room. He should be mildly hungry. He need not be on leash, but if you need to keep him on leash to keep him close at first, just stand on the end of it so he can't wander off. Once he starts playing the game, he'll want to stay close and you won't need the leash anymore.

Click and give your dog a treat from the bowl on the table. Do not reach toward the bowl until you have clicked. Do this about 10 times. Make sure the dog is in different positions when he hears the click (sitting, standing, facing you from the front, facing you from the side, etc.).

Repeat this session two times.

To test whether the dog understands that click=treat, wait until he is interested in something (not you) and click. If he turns to you looking for a treat, you know he's got the click/treat association. Now you're ready to start using the clicker to mark behaviors that you want the dog to do.

Step three: Teaching target

With your treats close by and your clicker in one hand, put your free hand an inch or two directly in front of your dog's nose. Your hand should be open and flat, palm out. When the dog sniffs your hand, C/T. You can feed the treat directly to the dog or throw it on the floor – make sure he sees it. Remove your target hand (put it behind your back) as you C/T. Repeat this about three times.

On the fourth time, move your hand a little to one side; on the next time, move your hand a little to the other side. Always C/T when the dog touches your hand with his nose. Be sure that you are not moving your hand into his nose.

Now present your hand a little higher, than a little lower, then a little further away from his nose (six inches). Always C/T when the dog touches your hand with his nose.

Now present your hand a little further away so that your dog must take a step or two to get to it. If he doesn't move, move your body around a little to see if you can get him up and moving (some dogs get stuck in the "sit" position if they have been rewarded for this in the past). Do this "moving" touch three or four times, then end your training session.

End your training session with a verbal cue, such as "all done." It's often nice to end a training session with some petting, some play, or a walk.

Tips:

- Keep the game moving and fun – your 15-20 clicks should happen in the space of two to three minutes.
- Try to avoid bending at the waist while training. Bend at the knees so that you are not looming over the dog. With a small dog it may be best to work on your knees, or alternatively, to put the dog up on a bench or table.
- End the session before your dog does, but if he loses interest before you stop, end the session and come back a little later. Sometimes dogs need a little time to process the new thing they are learning, so don't get discouraged by this.
- If you can, do three to four of these short sessions a day. If you can only do one, that's okay too. Your dog will remember what he learned and make progress either way.
- Remember click always means treat, so even if you make a mistake and click in error, he must receive a treat.

Moving On

- A good way to be sure your dog understands this behavior is to hold your hand high enough that he must lift his front feet off the floor to touch it. Once he offers this behavior, you can be fairly sure he understands what you want him to do.
- Adding a verbal cue – for this particular behavior, the cue is putting your hand out. No verbal cue is needed, but we humans like verbal cues, so if you want to add one, here's how. Once the dog is offering the behavior as soon as he sees your hand, start saying the cue word "touch" *as he touches his nose to your hand*. This way he is associating the word with his action. Do this for about two training sessions. In the next training session, say "touch" just before his nose touches your hand. Then, in subsequent sessions, say "touch" as you offer your hand. Now you have a verbal cue!
- Variable Schedule of Reinforcement – you have been using a "continuous schedule of reinforcement" which means the dog gets a treat every time he performs the behavior. Now you're ready to move to a variable schedule of reinforcement, meaning he only gets a treat sometimes. Only C/T every third, sixth, second, fourth, or tenth time he performs the behavior.
- Where to put the darn treats – if you started with the treats in a bowl, and now you're doing this behavior in other locations, you probably have already run into the problem of where to keep your treats. It's handy to buy a "bait bag" that you wear at your waist; this can be a bag made specifically for dog training or just a fanny pack. A carpenter's apron works well as does any kitchen apron with pockets.

Once your dog is performing the behavior reliably on cue (i.e., he will do the behavior when you give the verbal cue at least 90% of the time) on a variable schedule of reinforcement, you don't really need the clicker any more for that behavior. You should still reward your dog often with praise and variably with a food treat, but you don't need the clicker any more--until you're ready to teach a new behavior!

Loose Leash Walking

There are many ways of teaching loose leash walking and you may want to use several of the methods below. The most important thing is that, while you are teaching this skill, you must NEVER allow the dog to pull on the leash. We understand that this is hard because you may want to take your dog for a walk before he is fully proficient at not pulling. Use one or more of the methods explained here to train your dog and if you must walk him on leash before he understands not to pull, use a walking tool that helps to prevent pulling (see section at the end of this handout on "Walking Tools").

Setting up for Success

Start in an area with few or no distractions. You won't be able to hold your dog's attention if there are other pets, children, squirrels, rabbits, etc., running around.

Use a flat collar while training your dog, rather than a choke collar, prong collar or head halter.

Make sure your dog understands the clicker game (see handout "Getting Started with the Clicker").

Make your "loose leash" criteria very clear -- reward for NO tension on the leash, and do not allow your dog to pull "a little bit" because it is too difficult for the dog to learn the difference between pulling a little and pulling a lot. A good sign that the leash is loose is that the leash clip is hanging straight down from your dog's collar.

Getting Started

Start your training session with your dog in a sitting position at your side with a loose leash. As you step forward, slap your thigh to encourage her to walk with you. Click and treat (C/T) every one or two steps as long as your dog is not pulling.

Keep your dog's interest by using your voice, slapping your thigh, or making high-pitched sounds. C/T as long as the leash is loose. Anytime the leash tightens, stop moving. Get your dog's attention back on you, and then continue walking. If your dog continues to pull, you probably need to move to a less distracting environment.

Use a cue such as "with me" or "let's go" when you change directions.

Gradually increase the number of steps your takes before C/Ting.

Method 1: Red Light – Green Light

Begin walking a normal pace with your dog on leash. C/T for a few steps of non-pulling. If she darts out to the end of the leash, stop (don't pull back on the leash, just stop). Wait for your dog to ease up or look back at you (be patient). At that second, click and wait for your dog to come to you for the treat. Take a couple of steps. If your dog stays close and doesn't pull, C/T while you walk. Give lots of praise and "happy" talk while she walks with you. If she tightens the leash again, stop. As long as the distractions are kept to a minimum, most clicker-trained dogs will catch on.

Method 2: Choose to Heel

Work off-leash inside your home or in a safe, enclosed fenced area (like a tennis court). Walk around without saying a word to your dog. Every time she comes up to you, click, praise and treat. If she continues to walk with you, talk to her with a "happy" voice (use a high pitched "good dog"), and click and treat often. If she walks away after getting the treat, continue walking and wait for her to come to you again. If she totally ignores you, take a break and try again in a less-distracting area (the smells on the ground may be more interesting than you!). Next time, work with her before her regular feeding time (when she's hungry), and let her know you've got a delicious treat.

Tips:

- When you walk your dog, change directions frequently. This makes you more interesting to your dog and encourages her to pay attention. Give your cue word before you change direction and avoid yanking on the leash.
- Remember to start in a place with few distractions and gradually work up to locations where there are lots of distractions.
- Loose leash walking is a more relaxed behavior than a formal "heel." Heeling requires that the dog be intensely focused on you. This is very tiring for the dog and doesn't allow him the freedom to sniff and explore which is important for his mental and emotional well being. If you would like to teach a heel command, use it only when you need extra control – when crossing the street or walking in a crowd.
- With a puppy, these methods will work fairly quickly (if you are consistent). If you are working with an adult dog that has been "successfully" pulling for months or even years, this is going to take longer. Be patient.

Walking Tools

These tools may prevent your dog from pulling as hard (though some dogs do learn to pull even while wearing these tools), but they will NOT teach your dog to walk on a loose leash. Use them while you are working on loose leash walking to prevent setbacks in your training resulting from successful pulling. You may have to experiment with several tools to find the one that works the best for you and your dog. You may also need help getting the tool properly fitted.

- Head Halters: Head halters are a collar with a strap that goes around the dog's nose and the leash is attached under his chin. When the dog pulls, the head halter causes his nose to be turned back toward you, making it physically difficult for him to pull. There are several different brands of head halters (Gentle Leader™, Halti™, Canny Collar™ and Snoot Loop™, to name a few). Head halters must be properly fitted, introduced gradually, and used appropriately. See our handout, "How to Use a Head Halter."
- Front-hook Harnesses: As with head halters, the leash on a front-hook harness fastens in front of the dog's chest, so that when he pulls, he is turned back toward you. There are a few different brands of front-hook harnesses, including the Sensation/Sensible™ harness and the Easy Walk™ harness.
- No-pull Harness: These harnesses are designed to create pressure behind the dog's front legs, or around his chest when he pulls, making pulling uncomfortable for him. There are several brands of no pull harnesses including Sporn™ and Holt™.