



I have a 2-year-old Lab mix named Carlos. He has a lot of energy and still acts like a puppy. That's OK with me for the most part, but I'm concerned about how hard he pulls on his leash. Sometimes it feels like he's going to yank my arm off or pull me down the stairs. I'm considering getting a no-pull leash, but I don't know if that will be enough. Do you think I can train Carlos myself?

With patience, you should be able to train Carlos to walk nicely on a leash. At 2 years old, he's an adult (even though he acts like a puppy), and this is the perfect time for him to learn good manners. Pulling isn't just annoying, it is also potentially dangerous as even small dogs can pull you off your feet or injure your joints and muscles with their tugging.

Here are several things you can do to break the leash pulling habit.

1. Don't Reward Pulling

Your dog tugs on the leash to get the forward motion he needs to reach another dog, a great new smell, or something else that he badly wants. Every time you allow Carlos to pull you along, you are rewarding him for dragging you down the street. The trick is to teach him that pulling actually keeps him from his goal (the dog run, park, etc.) whereas walking nicely gets him there much faster. In the book "Citizen Canine," we describe two techniques that are effective for training your dog.

Technique A: If the dog pulls, you stop.

1. When your dog starts to pull, stop.
2. Stand still. Don't move forward with the dog.
3. Wait. The dog will pull, but eventually he'll stop.
4. When he stops pulling, you can praise him and move forward.
5. Uh-oh. He is so excited that you're moving forward, he's pulling again. Now what? Repeat the procedure. It won't take long until he figures out you aren't going anywhere as long as he pulls.

Technique B: If the dog pulls, change directions.

1. When your dog begins to drag you in the direction he wants to go, briskly turn and go in the

opposite direction. He'll have to come along, and most often, he will hurry to keep up with you.

2. When the dog begins to follow along in the direction in which you are moving, praise him and, during the beginning stages of training, give him a treat for coming. Your dog will soon learn to look to you to guide the walk rather than taking off in the direction he's decided he wants to go.

Remember, your dog may be stubborn and he may keep pulling for a while. You have to be just as stubborn and be willing to take the time to curb his bad leash habits.

2. **Do Take Time to Smell the Roses**

When you go on a walk with your dog, you may have a destination in mind. You may be walking around the block or across the park. That's fine. Remember though, walks are also a way for dogs to learn about the world in which they live, and sometimes you should let the dog sniff and smell to explore new objects or scents. The problem is that the dog can get confused about what behavior you expect from him during these different types of walks.

Verbal cues will help the dog distinguish between when he needs to trot along with you and when it is acceptable to stop and sniff. If you are seriously walking from point A to point B, give the dog an instruction such as "let's walk." He'll soon begin to walk at a brisk focused pace when he hears "let's walk."

If he is allowed to sniff and smell to his heart's content, try saying something like "free dog" (even though the dog is on leash) to help Carlos differentiate between walk time and casual sniffing time. Clear commands will make you both happier during the walk.

3. **Maybe You Should Try No-Pull Collars, Leashes, and Harnesses**

You mentioned getting special equipment and it is true that no-pull leashes, harnesses and collars can be excellent management tools. The problem is that in many cases, the dog does not learn new skills as a result of wearing these devices. If you remove the no-pull leash and the dog pulls again, he has not learned to walk nicely on a leash, and you have simply managed the behavior.

Having said that, no-pull specialty collars and leashes can be good tools for owners who have physical problems and are particularly helpful to the elderly or disabled. They can also be good when an owner suffers an injury where pulling can be harmful. In these cases, a no-pull harness can prevent injuries to the owner and provide the dog with an opportunity for a daily walk that he might not otherwise receive.

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