



Loose Leash Walking - Proofing & Generalization

Introduction

Congratulations on working through Phase 1 and 2 of Loose Leash Walking Skills! Now you are ready to embark on the “More Challenging” phase of teaching your puppy to walk nicely on the leash. In the Beginners and Improvers phases, we focused on putting some fundamental loose leash walking skills in place. We also started to work on the foundations of proofing by increasing the distance we traveled and by practicing our loose leash walking skills in low distraction environments.

The More Challenging phase of loose leash walking skills will give you some guidance on how to further proof the behavior, so your puppy is able to work towards generalizing walking on a loose leash in heel position. Whatever the circumstances.

Definitions

Proofing is when we repeat a behavior with our puppies in a variety of different circumstances, so your puppy learns to perform the behavior whenever and whatever. This means that the behavior has become **generalized**.

How to Proof Loose Leash Walking

In Phase 1 and 2 we started proofing loose leash walking by progressing to traveling short distances in a few low distraction environments.

If your puppy can:

- ✿ Walk with you on a loose leash for around a minute in an indoor, low-distraction environment, and give a few voluntary check-ins during that period, and



- ✿ Walk with you on a loose leash for around a minute in an outdoor, low-distraction environment, and give a few check-ins during that period,

You are ready to move on to working in some more distracting environments to further proof loose leash walking.

- ☐ Stage 1 - Start with short outings to indoor, medium-distraction environments and aim to walk around with your puppy on a loose leash for short periods of time. Take breaks in between periods of loose leash walking so it's not overwhelming for your puppy. Some examples of medium distraction environments would be:

- ✿ Target or a grocery store at a less busy time.
- ✿ A home improvement store like Home Depot or Lowes at a less busy time (but beware of pet dog distractions).
- ✿ A mall at a less busy time.
- ✿ A medical building with moderate people traffic.
- ✿ A hockey arena, but not at peak practice/game time.
- ✿ A public library.
- ✿ A museum or art gallery during a less busy time.

- ☐ Stage 2 - Once you have visited a few different indoor locations and you are both gaining confidence you can add some outdoor locations. Outdoor locations are generally more distracting as there are more smells, items on the ground, and there are other creatures about! Examples of medium-distraction outdoor environments would be:

- ✿ A park where there are soccer or baseball games going on.
- ✿ A moderately busy downtown area.
- ✿ Close to a school during drop-off or pick-up time.
- ✿ Walking around your neighborhood at "doggy rush hour."
- ✿ A sculpture park at a moderately busy time.



As with the indoor locations, start with a medium-distraction level and short outings, and as you gain confidence you can increase the level of distractions and outing duration.

- ☐ Stage 3 - As you both gain competence and confidence, you can practice your loose leash walking in busier and therefore more distracting environments both indoor and outdoor, gradually building up the duration of your outings.

How to Set Up for Success

- ✿ Some puppies, particularly if they are high-energy, may never reach this phase during their time in the Foster Puppy Program. That's OK, there is still plenty of time during the Prison Program and Training!!
- ✿ Always set reasonable expectations for your puppy according to the environment, their developmental stage, and their emotional state at the time.
- ✿ Keep loose leash walking training sessions short and sweet.
- ✿ Distance is your best friend with distractions!
- ✿ Some puppies may have a particular distraction (frequently other dogs) that they cannot be around without losing focus. That's OK, we are not expecting perfection and there is plenty of time to work on this in prison or back at PAWS during training.
- ✿ Be consistent.
 - ✿ If your puppy is allowed to pull towards a distraction once, that will become rewarding for them, and they will try to do it again.
 - ✿ Apply the same rules when you are taking leisure walks or going outside for breaks as you do in a training session.
 - ✿ If multiple people in your household work with your puppy, make sure you are all following the same rules and setting similar expectations.



- ✦ If you are in a more distracting environment and your puppy is struggling, lower your expectations. Take fewer steps, go back to walks to nowhere, be more encouraging for check-ins, or whatever works so you can be successful in that training session.