



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Loose Leash Walking

Teaching a Guide Dog Puppy Loose Leash Walking – “Let’s Go”

Focus is on rewarding puppies with food for desired leash walking behavior before the puppy begins pulling on leash. Desired leash walking (i.e. loose leash, staying at left leg, aware of the handler without staring at the handler) is marked with “Nice” to promote loose leash walking.

Goal

Upon the verbal cue “Let’s Go”, the puppy walks on the handler’s left side next to the handler’s left leg (with the area between the dog’s nose and shoulder beside the handler’s leg) on a loose leash in a variety of environments, including those with distractions.

Video Reference

<https://youtu.be/8Mvm4vj5s0Y>

Preparation

Food reward location and delivery

- Puppies under 4 months of age: Handler has bait bag on left side and will deliver food rewards to the puppy using left hand.
- Puppies over 4 months of age: Handler has bait bag centered on the lower back, out of sight of the puppy, and will deliver food rewards to the puppy using left hand. Note: pockets may be used to store food temporarily but due to the amount of food being dispensed a bait bag is more practical.
- Food reward is delivered next to the handler’s left leg – where the puppy was at the time it was marked with “Nice”.
- Always make sure you have plenty of food rewards in your pouch or pocket.

Marking Desired Behavior with the Verbal “Nice”

- Strive to make your verbal “Nice” sound unique, not like speaking the word nice in conversation. Shortening the word and putting a higher pitch on the word than normal will help it stand out to the puppy as a marker versus a word.
- Only move towards the food reward after finishing the verbal marker of “Nice”. Hand movements towards the food rewards will distract the puppy from being aware of what behavior resulted in the food.
- Always follow your verbal “Nice” with a food reward. This keeps it as a strong marker signal to the puppy.

Criteria for Loose Leash Walking

All of the conditions below should be met for you to mark the puppy with “Nice”, followed with food reward.

- Puppy is walking
- Puppy is on the left side with their ear next to the handlers left pant seam
- There is enough slack in the leash to prevent pressure on the neck collar or head collar
- Puppy is looking in the direction it is traveling in, not staring at the handler

Getting Started

- With the puppy on your left side, say “Let’s go” and begin walking
- Be ready to mark before the puppy begins to walk ahead and pull
- Watch for all of the above criteria to be met (but don’t stare at the puppy!)
- Mark with “Nice”, and gradually come to a stop, taking a few steps to do so. If you stop too suddenly the puppy might “overshoot”
- Hold the leash such that that you can reach for a piece of kibble with your left hand
- Deliver the kibble along the plane of your left pant leg. The pup will maintain a straight position more easily if it is fed from the left hand straight in front of its nose
- Pause your walking until the puppy swallows
- Begin walking again and repeat steps. The more marks the puppy receives, the more loose leash behavior the puppy will offer you

Notes

- A high rate of reward (how often you mark with “Nice”) is essential in teaching this skill. You will want to ensure a high rate of reward when:
 - first beginning this exercise in order to keep the puppy engaged
 - working with a puppy who has a tendency to pull on the leash
 - working in an environment with increased distractions
- Practice in an “easy” environment each day in order to build the puppy’s skill in the behavior. This may be around your block or just in front of your house. With fewer distractions you will give the puppy more successful repetitions in loose leash walking.
- The rate of reward will vary based on the environment you are in. But don’t be stingy! You cannot really over mark the puppy as long as the puppy is performing the criteria listed above.
- Your placement of reward during food delivery must be consistent and accurate. Bring the food to the puppy (where they were during the “Nice”). Avoid letting the puppy be rewarded for moving to the food. If the puppy moves forward after your “Nice”, with food in your hand, gently push the puppy back a few steps into the original position as you deliver the kibble.
- You will always need food rewards on you! This training technique is for all kinds of walking (e.g. in stores, around the block, around the office). The puppy should be rewarded for loose leash walking regardless of where you are.
- Food that goes into your bait bag needs to come out of your puppy’s daily ration. It is recommended that you put most of your puppy’s meal inside your bait bag; at the end of the day what is left goes into his bowl.
- If you are practicing and the puppy is still pulling or creating a tight leash, see your leader.