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Uses for a Long Leash

On a recent trip to Saddle River Park in Saddle Brook, New Jersey there was a sign at the entrance to the path. The sign stated that (1) you must clean up after your dog (a 'no brainer' in my opinion) and (2) all dogs must be on a six-foot leash, *flexi leashes and long leashes are not allowed*. Upon reading that sign, a huge smile broke out on my face! This is what I have been preaching for years; finally I have been legitimized by Saddle Brook, New Jersey!

Long Leash Use

A long leash or flexi leash is to be used only as a training tool. A long leash or a flexi leash is a great way of adding distance and polishing up on your dog's obedience commands, not walking. I use a long leash for long distance recalls, hand signals, the stay commands, etc.

A long leash is not for walking!

The Importance of the Walk

The walk teaches the dog that you are Alpha or pack leader. When you are walking your dog it is important that he or she remains at your side. Your dog should NEVER be in front of you on a walk. In a pack environment the leader of the pack or the Alpha is the dog that is out in front. If you own more than one dog, take note of which dog is the first out the door, the first in line for treats, the first at the door when the door bell rings; that dog is the Alpha.

If you walk your dog on a long leash and allow him to be out in front you are allowing him to be your Alpha. Maybe your dog demonstrating his Alpha position is not important for the walk but the problem will definitely come up in other areas of your dog's life.

I can hear the 'Nay Sayers' in my ears: My dog walks faster than other dogs, my dog needs more exercise so I allow him to go out in front, my dog needs to relieve himself so I don't mind if he is at the end of the leash. You are incorrect, the only thing you are doing is reinforcing in your dog's head that you are his servant and he is above you.

My Dog walks faster than other dogs: While that may be true, your dog should adapt to your pace and the pace of each person in your household. Whether he is jogging with you or taking a slow and leisurely walk with your grandmother, he should adapt to that individual's pace. In dog language, it is a sign of respect that one dog does not pull out in front of another. Your dog knows this so make sure he is at your side at all times.

My dog needs more exercise so I allow him to go out in front: Your dog is going to get just as much exercise if he is walking your pace. If you feel he needs to run before you go for a walk with him throw the ball in your yard ten times before you go out.

My dog needs to relieve himself so I don't mind if he is at the end of the leash: When I walk my dogs I pick designated spots along the way for my dogs to sniff and relieve themselves. When I come to that spot I release my dogs from my side with the phrase "okay" and allow them to go out to the end of my six-foot leash to smell and urinate. If you would like to put your long leash on at this point, it is all right to do so but you must stand still, do not begin walking again.

Do not to let your dog drag you and pull you from tree to tree. A walk is supposed to teach him that you are his Alpha so you must set certain limitations during the walk and he must obey them. Again, I pick designated spots for my dogs to relieve themselves; this is a walk for exercise and mental stimulation. If I allow them to stop every three feet along the walk to smell, my dogs are controlling the walk and me; another 'no no' in dog language. The Alpha of the pack controls when the pack eats, sleeps, plays, walks, hunts and exercises. If you allow your dog to stop along the way then he or she is controlling the exercising.

Long Leash for Walking –Bad Idea!

If you own a large dog it is virtually impossible to control your dog when he is at the end of a long leash or flexi-leash. If he wants to drag you to something, it is so easy to do so. The long leash allows the dog to pull, allowing him to throw his chest out during the walk. This posture is establishing dominance so if he is walking toward another dog, he will either give the message that he is a tough guy or growl at the on coming dog. It's like watching body builders leave a gym, they exit the facility throwing their chest out like they are the strongest and toughest thing around, and the dog feels the same arrogance when he is pulling you on a walk.

Conclusion:

Please, don't humanize your dog and allow your thoughts of your dog needing space to influence how you walk your dog. A walk is so important for establishing your dominance or Alpha position that if you walk your dog the wrong way you are subconsciously telling your dog that he is at a higher level than you. You already feed him and give him treats and pick up his feces, don't convince your dog 100% that you are his slave by allowing him to pull you on a walk.

A change in your dog's behavior during a walk is not going to happen overnight. He may fight you for the position of being out in front; but you will see a change in your dog when this type of walk becomes a habit for him.

Walking your dog regularly often will release the leash frustration that many dogs have. Your dog can NEVER pull you on a walk but doesn't need to focus on you're the whole time. Let him or her sniff at your discretion but remember it is a walk for physical exercise also and stopping every two minutes is not physical enough of a walk.

Beth Bradley

Beth Bradley began studying animal behavior and dog training at 12 years of age. She became a New Jersey State Animal Control Officer in 1986. Beth graduated Rutgers University with a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Criminal Justice. Throughout her schooling, Beth worked and studied under many well-renowned animal behaviorists and trainers. Beth formed her own company in 1989 and has made dog training her full time career since 1995. Beth is also a writer for the *Animal Companion*, she has produced CD-Roms and DVD's on training and is author of a training book titled *Real World Dog Training*.

Beth is a member of the German Shepherd Dog Club of America, the German Shepherd Dog Club of America – Working Dog Association, the United Schutzhund Clubs of America, and she is Secretary and Training Director of the Greater Philadelphia Schutzhund Club. Beth actively competes in both American Kennel Club and Schutzhund Trials both in the United States of America and Europe. Beth is a certified Canine Good Citizen Evaluator for the American Kennel Club. Beth can be contacted via the web at www.dog-trainer.biz or her business (201) 247-8472.