

Training Tip Tuesday: LLW Foundations

We've had a lot of questions this week on Loose Leash Walking [LLW], so I decided to revisit the foundation step for today's tip. In a previous tip, we talked about how LLW actually has nothing to do with the leash! In order to be successful, your dog must understand LLW as a position; just like sit or down. Once your dog understands where he's supposed to be; you can start adding distraction and increasing distance with ease!

Before you begin; make sure your dog has had a bit of exercise. Later on, it won't matter – but to start you want to set yourself up for success. You also want to make sure you are consistent with your expectations. LLW is different than a formal heel; so you can set your own standard. For my dogs; as long as I don't feel them on the leash (they don't pull too far ahead or behind) and they offer eye contact periodically – that's good enough for me!

You also want to make sure you take the time to teach LLW **before** you have to use it. If you take your dog for a walk every day, and every day your walks are a miserable contest of wills; each pulling the other in opposite directions; ending in frustration – your dog will start to learn that's what he's supposed to do; it will become an ingrained habit. I know you think you have to get your dog exercise; and you've been told that you should be going for walks; but focus on things you can do successfully. Getting dragged around the neighborhood won't do anyone any good!

To teach your dog the proper position; start with your dog in front of you. Face your dog, with the leash in your right hand, and a yummy treat in the left. (The treat so be enticing enough to be motivating, but not so good that its over-stimulating! Save the super high value treats for times when you are in the presence of more distractions) Get your dog interested in the treat, step back with your left leg, and lure them past your left leg. Lure them back until their shoulder passes your leg, then move your hand towards you, so your dog hooks in; the pattern looks like the letter 'J'. As he lines up with your leg, step back in line. This will mimic your legs moving, and help the dog understand where he is supposed to be. Reward your dog as soon as his ear is in line with your pant-seam. Step in front of your dog, turn to face him, and repeat this routine several more times.

Once you can easily lure him into position; start adding a sit. Ideally, when you stop moving, your dog should sit and wait patiently. Simply repeat the process above, and when he comes into position, ask for the sit. By teaching him to line up and sit first; he will not rush forward anticipating movement!

Once you can lure the position and the sit, add a few forward steps. It is crucial to only for 2 or 3 steps at a time. Keep your reward in front of your dog and help him stay in the right position. You can gradually build up duration/distance. It is important to note that, as you start increasing distance, you need to watch your dog. Don't wait for them to hit the end of the leash before you decide you need to do something! Anticipate any distractions, and encourage your dog to stay focused even before he finds something else to be worried about. Make sure you mark/reward him when he's right! In the video, you will see Ava jump up at my hand a few times; this is common and I don't correct it. I WANT the enthusiasm! If I start correcting her every time she gets excited about doing something – it won't be long before she doesn't want to play my game any more. Instead, I simply ignore her shenanigans; and as soon as she gets it right – that's when I acknowledge and reward!

<https://youtu.be/bjIXfWiKzol>