DOG PLUS ME · THE FIX SERIES · NO. 04

The Leash Pulling Fix

The step-by-step plan for loose-leash walks, sore-free shoulders and a dog who checks in. For puppies, teenage dogs, adults and rescues.

Reward-based | The Pull Finder | 14 real-life situations | 10 printables



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START HERE · 2 MINUTES

You don't need to read this whole guide before your next walk.

You need the parts that match your dog. Find yourself below and follow that path. Everything else is there when you need it.

IF THIS IS YOU…	READ THIS, IN THIS ORDER
You're walking the dog today	The walk setup in Ch. 1. That's enough for today. Tomorrow, the Pull Finder (Ch. 2), then the Pocket (Ch. 4) and Green Light Walking (Ch. 5).
The front-door launch: worst in the first five minutes	Situation 1 → take the edge off before you leave (Ch. 3) → Green Light Walking (Ch. 5). Start on a quieter route.
Other dogs, people, squirrels or smells	The Pull Finder (Ch. 2) → Situation 2 for dogs, 3 for squirrels and cats, 4 for people, 5 for sniffers. Barking, growling, snapping or fear? Part 4, "When to get help", first.
You've been hurt, or you're scared of falling	Situation 8 → the gear in Ch. 3. Today: never wrap the leash around your fingers or wrist, and keep walks short and quiet.
Kids, family or a dog walker	Ch. 8 → Situation 9 → put the Green Light Card (Printable 6) by the door and send the Family & Walker Handout (Printable 7). An adult holds the leash of any dog that pulls.
Teenage dog, rescue or years of pulling	The Pull Finder (Ch. 2) → Situation 11 for teens, or Situation 12 for rescues and adults → the Street Ladder (Ch. 7). Expect months, not days.
"Nothing works" or "perfect at home, wild outside"	Run the Pull Finder (Ch. 2) again: the fix may not match the cause. Then drop one rung on the Street Ladder (Ch. 7) and read Situation 14. Lunging, fear or pain? Part 4.

How this guide is different

- **It finds the why first.** Habit, Hype, Hunt or Hello. Each one needs a different first move, and the Pull Finder (Ch. 2) tells you which.
- **It gives you rules, not vibes.** Exactly what to do the second the leash goes tight, where every treat lands, how often to pay, and when you're ready for a busier street.
- **It has a plan B.** For the dog who keeps pulling when you stop, or spots a squirrel. The Happy U-Turn gets you out.
- **It keeps you safe too.** How to hold the leash, who holds it, and the plan for a big dog with a small or older owner.

- **It's kind.** No prong, choke or shock collars, no spray collars, no leash pops or "corrections", no tightening "no-pull" gear, no retractable leashes. Many dogs lean into pressure, and pain-based tools can cause stress and fear.

> WHERE THIS COMES FROM
>
> Every recommendation is based on published guidance from veterinary schools and hospitals, welfare charities and peer-reviewed research, in plain steps. Where sources disagree, we take the safer, welfare-first position. Where a rule is our own, we say so. Sources are listed at the back. This guide is educational and doesn't replace your vet.

HONEST EXPECTATIONS

What's normal: honest timelines

You'll see courses promising "stop pulling in 10 days". We won't. No reliable source gives an end date for leash pulling, so we don't invent one. Here's what the sources do say, so you can measure progress against reality instead of a sales pitch.

STAGE	WHAT'S HAPPENING	WHAT'S NORMAL
Week 1–2	Learning the rules at home, in the yard and on quiet streets	The first calmer walks, at home and on quiet streets. Walks take longer while you're learning. Lots of stops
The first months	Moving up to your usual route, one rung at a time	Good walks and bad walks. "It takes most dogs several months of regular practice," say VCA's veterinary behaviorists
Puppies	Leash skills can start indoors, even before vaccinations are finished	Short, sniffy, puppy-paced walks. Chewing the leash is common at first (Situation 10)
About 6–18 months	Adolescence	A teenage dip is common. One study found owner-reported pulling peaked at about 12 months, then fell. It's owner reports only, and nobody knows if that's growing up or training
Adults and rescues	A habit that has worked for years	No source gives a timeline. Expect several months. Progress is real even when it's slow

Times are approximate and vary by dog, route and how often you practice. Some breeds bred to pull, like sled, working and tracking dogs, can be harder to train, says one vet school handout.

OUR HONEST ANSWER TO "WILL HE EVER STOP?"

Yes, most dogs can learn to walk on a loose leash. Expect the first calmer walks in the first week or two at home and on quiet streets. Busy streets, other dogs and squirrels take months for most dogs. A teenage dip along the way is common, not failure. If you see lunging, fear or pain at any stage, that's a different problem: get help (Part 4).

Our standard: "walk-ready"

"Walk-ready" is our own standard, not a vet or charity one. Your dog is walk-ready when, **for 5 walks in a row on your usual route:**

- [ ] the leash is loose for most of the walk
- [ ] you never need two hands to hold on
- [ ] your dog turns back with you on "This way!"

Until then, your dog is "in training". Walk-ready doesn't mean your dog never pulls again. It means pulling is rare, short and easy to stop.

Three things that will happen (and are normal)

1. **Walks get slower before they get better.** Plan a shorter route, not a shorter fuse (Ch. 1).

2. **A great week, then a bad walk.** It's not failure. It's data. Two walks in a row with frequent pulling means you go back one rung on the Street Ladder and climb again (our rule; Ch. 7).
3. **Sometimes the squirrel wins.** That's when the Happy U-Turn (Ch. 5) takes over. One fix doesn't have to work every time. The system does.

READ THIS IF YOU FEEL GUILTY

You're not raising a puller.

Maybe your shoulder aches after every walk, or you're scared you'll break a limb. Owners say "every walk is painful" and that pulling is "driving me to despair". You're in good company.

One survey found 44% of UK owners said their dog pulls on the leash, the top problem they named. You haven't failed, and your dog isn't bad. Here's why.

Pulling is learned, because it works

Dogs pull to get where they want to go. Every time a pull moves them forward, even one step, it tells them pulling works. Over time, it becomes a habit. And many dogs lean into pressure: pull back and they pull forward harder. So the tug-of-war we all fall into makes pulling stronger.

It isn't dominance, and it isn't defiance. Dogs Trust says plainly that pulling is not about defiance, spite or dominance. The "pack leader" idea is wrong. One survey found about 1 in 5 owners of pulling dogs believed their dog "wants to be in charge". It was a self-selected sample, but the belief leads to harsh fixes that don't help. You don't need to win. You need to teach.

How to start again

1. **Drop anything that adds pain or pressure.** Leash pops, jerks, pulling back, scolding, and gear that tightens or hurts. None of it teaches your dog where to walk.
2. **Take the edge off first.** A few minutes of play before you leave (our rule of thumb: about 5). Many dogs pull less once their energy is taken down a notch, say Dogs Trust and PDSA.
3. **Find the why.** Run the Pull Finder (Ch. 2). The fix depends on the cause.
4. **Pick one rule for everyone who walks your dog.** Tight leash stops, loose leash goes. The same way, every time, on every walk (Ch. 5).

THIS IS NORMAL PULLING

- A loose, wiggly body, tail up, nose busy
- Pulling *toward* things: the park, smells, people, dogs
- Worse at the start, after a quiet day, or in busy places

GET HELP IF

- Lunging with barking, growling or snapping, at dogs or people
- Pulling *away* from things in fear, or freezing and refusing to walk
- Limping, stiffness, a sudden change, or any bite history

Right-hand column? That's not your failure either. It isn't a pulling problem: vet first, then Part 4, "When to get help".

THE ONE THING TO REMEMBER

It's OK to skip a training walk and play a sniffing game in the yard instead. That's not giving up. Calm owners teach loose leashes. You're reading this page, so you're already doing better than you think.

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