

# Beggin' to Behave

## Sandy Strychor, ABCDT

### WALKING THOSE DIFFICULT DOGS....

There are a number of reasons a dog may be a challenge to walk. Assess why the dog is a difficult walker. Is it a puller, reactive, or is he fearful or aggressive?

**Start with CALM.** Calm for the walker and calm for the dog. If you aren't calm the dog will pick up and this and be excited and hard to harness or leash and this will continue on the way out the door. Remember to breathe!

No matter which category the dog being walked is in, always keep the leash short! A long leash means less control for the walker. You want the dog by your side. He should not have enough leash to gain momentum to drag you down the street or pull you over.

**The Puller:** For the puller try a properly fitted and adjusted no-pull harness like an Easy Walk harness or No-Pull Freedom Harness. Some devices go around the head and muzzle, like the Gentle Leader, Walk 'n Train, and K9 Bridle. A dog will pull when there is tension on the leash, even if it makes them choke. All of these devices work by pull the head, or body, to the side when the dog pulls causing him to turn. It is hard to pull ahead with the head or body turned to the side.

Each and every time the harness is put on the dog you should check the fit. Like the collar, a well fitted harness should only allow for two fingers to fit between the dog and the material. Too loose and it will not work and the dog will slip out. Too tight and it will rub the dog raw and cause pain and discomfort. Add a 'Houdini clip' or strap to a head harness that connects the harness to his collar so that if he slips out of the harness he can't get away from you.

Every time the dog is walked he should not be allowed to pull. The problem with letting a dog pull you down the street is that it is a 'self-rewarding behavior'. The dog believes he got to where he wanted to go from pulling. Even if the dog only gets to pull every once in a while, he will continue to pull all the time because on occasion...he wins. So he should never get to pull, even once in a while, or the behavior will not stop.

**The Reactive Fearful Dog:** Start with calmness. Walk in areas the dog considers 'comfort zones', areas he knows well and isn't fearful of his surroundings. Over time you can move a block or two further outside his comfort zone. But go slowly. Avoid places that have a lot of people (especially children), noise, traffic and other dogs or anything else the dog may become anxious over. Increase his experience gradually. Give praise or yummy treats as you near the border of the zone. Talk to him and let him know you are there and in control.

Beggin' to Behave Dog Training      [www.beggintobehave.com](http://www.beggintobehave.com)      [beggintobehave@gmail.com](mailto:beggintobehave@gmail.com)

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**The Reactive Aggressive Dog:** If a dog is aggressive, or potentially aggressive, I highly suggest adapting the dog to a muzzle. This will keep everyone safe. There are many good on line videos of how to get a dog into a muzzle. Never just shove it on his face! Start by feeding the dog treats placed in the muzzle. Try a little peanut butter on the bottom to get his whole face inside the muzzle. Gradually put it on his face and buckle it as directed.

Walk the dog when fewer dogs and people are out and about. Keep him inside the area of comfort. Gradually expose him to his triggers. If possible, get people to help you with this by walking by, at a safe distance, and tossing a super yummy treat as they walk by.

They should not look at, or talk to the dog. Eventually they can get a little closer and closer. If it is bicycles that the dog reacts to- have those people on bicycles.

Carry an air horn and some wonderful treats. An air horn will not hurt your dog and it is a safe way to break off a dog that is in an aggressive mode. It may not be the dog you are walking that is the instigator. Dogs often pick up on the reactivity of other dogs.

Add a distraction. Start tossing those yummy treats on the ground for him to find in the grass. With his nose buried in the grass and his head down, he will not notice the trigger walking (or riding by). If you don't have treats turn him away from the object and towards you.

**Never walk a dog that you don't feel secure walking!** This is a recipe for failure and potential disaster. The dog will pick up on your fear and be more reactive. You must remain calm and in control. Walk with confidence with your shoulders back and your head high. Be alert for triggers but not fearful of them. If you put tension on the leash, your dog will go on alert, ready to find the danger out there.

