

INTRODUCTION TO A LEAD

All dogs should become accustomed to wearing a collar from an early age. Ideally they should be introduced to this around the age of 7-12 weeks. This is during what we call the sensitive period of development. From 6 to 16 weeks of age your pup is primed to accept lots of new people and environments. Once they have received their vaccinations you will need to ensure they experience everything they may need to cope with as an adult racing dog and later as a retired pet. To do this you will need to ensure they can wear a collar and walk on a leash.

You will need

- a flat collar made out of leather or nylon (not a choke chain of any type)
- 6 foot leash made out of leather or nylon

The Collar

Choose a soft buckle collar (with a very young pup you may like to use a cat collar) that is not too long for the neck of your pup. Measure around your pup's neck and ensure that the end of the collar is not so long that it hangs down once it is through the buckle. Some pups will attempt to play with this and inadvertently frighten themselves or get caught up.

Most pups will accept the collar with minimal interest, some will jump, roll, paw at it. Don't encourage this behaviour by laughing or paying any attention. When they stop, reward with a treat or toy. Distract them if necessary with a game, a walk outside or a chew toy. Accustom them to wearing a collar for a few hours each day. Don't leave them unsupervised with collars on – particularly if they are running with other dogs.

Connect the leash to the collar

Allow the pup to sniff the collar and lead and put the collar on the pup. Clip the leash to it and offer a food treat so the pup associates the leash being clipped on with food. Do this 3 or 4 times. Repeat this for at least the first week that you put a collar and lead on them.

Allow them to drag the leash around a safe area for a few minutes. Supervise closely at this stage (to make sure it doesn't get caught on anything).

If they are worried by the lead dragging behind them give them some time to get used to it, distract them with a toy or some treats and wait until they are no longer concerned. Most pups will grow accustomed to the lead relatively quickly. Once they are calm – reward with food or a chase game or toy.

Take hold of the end of the leash. Initially the dog may:

- Sit down/lie down
- Pull back
- Jump around

Ignore this initially, the second the dog stops or turns its attention to you, praise with food or a toy. Repeat this.

Call the dog to you and as they start to move, you walk with them. This is another good time to use food treats. You can lure the dog to move forward by showing them a treat at their eye level and having them walk next to you for varying distances before they receive it. Once they are used to walking on the lead the opportunity to explore and exercise will become a reward in itself.

Difficulties:

There are two common difficulties when teaching a dog to walk on a lead:

1. Pulling: some pups (particularly older ones) learn to pull their handler along very quickly in order to explore their outside world. If this happens walk the dog in a familiar area (their exercise paddock would be a good option). If they start to pull, stop walking and stand still. You may also like to take 2 steps backwards. When the dog eventually realizes he/she will not be able to go forward they will redirect their attention to you. When the leash becomes slack, reward them with food treat and praise. Repeat this many times until the dog realizes that the only way to move forward is with a slack leash. This can then be practiced in other areas, on the street, at the racetrack etc.
2. Refusing to move: if this happens when out walking allow the dog to retreat to a distance where the behavior stops. Allow them to recover and then encourage them forward using food treats and praise. Do not drag them forward. If necessary go back to the kennel and start again using the method above – encourage the dog to walk at your side and use food to reward them for doing so at regular intervals when they do so. Then gradually increase the challenging environment – some pups can become quickly overwhelmed and will show this ‘freezing’ behavior. Accept that these pups may take a little longer but if they are gradually exposed with lots of positive treats, praise and games they will grow in confidence as they mature.