

## GETTING STARTED - CONTROLLED WALKS/LOOSE LEASH STRATEGIES

**Aim:** for your dog to be able to walk at your pace in a relaxed fashion without too much pulling on the leash.



**Remember:** if we don't want our dogs to pull we avoid letting them practice pulling.

We walk much more slowly than our dogs and are inconsistent in how we dress, our speed and direction, which makes it hard for our dogs! Be patient!

**Balance harnesses** such as the one shown here are very helpful for a number of reasons

- Take the pressure off the neck (which is uncomfortable and in reactive dogs can lead to more lunging/barking etc)
- Encourage use of TWO points of contact such that you can give clear instructions, with one point of contact (e.g. collar only or harness only) we can't help but pull back when the dog starts to pull
- Help the dog to actually stand and move in balance on all four paws rather than constantly straining forward or back
- Walking on the balance harness helps the dog break the habit of pulling, making it much easier to then teach loose lead walking on a flat collar if you want to do this later



Mekuti harness, image from [www.mekuti.co.uk](http://www.mekuti.co.uk)

**You can try a variety of equipment on loan from Morag before deciding which is most suitable for your dog.**

### **Useful Games to prepare for loose lead walking:**

Unless your dog is able to focus on you (see sheets on markers and communication) in the house and garden it will be very difficult to teach them to pay attention and walk at your speed outside!

**Moving back-ups:** with dog on or off leash, back away encouraging them towards you with nice noises (not their name). Mark and reward any movement towards you.

Move faster and slower, change direction until they turn into you as soon as you back away.

**Sticky dogs:** in the garden/house/on a walk when your dog is close to you, mark and reward. Change direction and hurry away – mark and reward when your dog chases after you. Throw the food reward off to one side so the dog needs to actively come back to your side. Work on this until dog is clear that being by your side is a really great thing!

### **When out walking:**

- Start off calmly – dog waits by door to be invited outside, if too excited close door and wait.
- Once outside ask for a sit or other simple behaviour – is the dog able to focus on you?
- Decide which side you want your dog to walk on – you can train both but be consistent!
- Make sure you are by your dog's shoulder before you set off – allowing them plenty of leash to get ahead just makes life difficult for both of you
- Aim only to walk a few paces initially
- Let your dog know when you are setting off – communicate with them
- As soon as there is pulling in any direction stop and give signals as shown using the harness i.e. "be a tree" Pulling will not get them any closer to their goal
- If necessary turn away and take a couple of paces in the opposite direction, only continue moving when dog is nicely balanced and not straining at all
- Remember to use sniffing as a reward when dog walks nicely – actively give a cue such as "go sniff" and encourage sniffing at an interesting tree or verge
- Be wary of allowing your dog to pull you around and stop whenever they like to sniff – they are learning to do their own thing rather than take a walk WITH you

If you need to get somewhere in a hurry – either drive if possible, or clip the leash to the top harness ring and encourage them to go up ahead. This makes the distinction between walking nicely by your side and being told to go on and pull.

My dogs are encouraged to pull in certain situations (CaniX cross country running) but generally are expected to walk calmly by my side – dogs can learn these distinctions