

In-House Behavior Modification Protocol Acclimating a dog to a leash

The behavior modification techniques we use for this issue are Systematic Desensitization and Counterconditioning.

Systematic Desensitization involves exposing the dog to the fearful stimulus, increasing the intensity of the stimulus slowly over time, until he/she no longer reacts fearfully when exposed to it.

Counterconditioning is a procedure used to help change the dog's emotional response to the scary stimulus from negative to positive by pairing the scary thing with something desirable to the dog (high value food treat, toys, play, etc.)

Acclimating a dog to a leash

Make sure you use high value treats during this process (e.g., cheese, meat).

NOTE: Start this process with a lightweight leash so that when you get to the point where the dog is dragging the leash it isn't too heavy.

Step 1 – put the leash on the floor/ground and surround it high value treats so that the dog will be enticed to go near it to get the food. The leash on the floor/ground should not elicit fear – it will just be something that is associated with the high value treats. Do this several sessions until you see the dog perfectly comfortable approaching and eating the treats near the leash.

Step 2 – Hang the leash around your neck while you hand feed the dog the high value treats. This will connect the leash to you and the treats. Do this several sessions until the dog is perfectly comfortable taking the treats from you with the leash around your neck.

Step 3 – Hold the leash in one hand while you feed the dog the treats with the other hand. Do this several sessions until the dog is comfortable approaching you and taking the treats while you hold the leash in your other hand.

Step 4 – Hold out the leash to the dog and when the dog sniffs it, say “good” and give the dog a treat. Do this several sessions until the dog actively sniffs and touches the leash with his/her nose.

Step 5 – Now that the dog is comfortable with the sight of the leash and will actually sniff it and touch it with his/her nose, you can start to desensitize him/her to you clipping the leash onto the collar or harness. While the dog is eating high value treats from one hand – the other hand can clip the leash onto the harness or collar. Do this several sessions so that the dog gets used to you clipping the leash on. You will be taking it off once the treats are gone.

Step 6 – Clip the leash onto the dog's collar or harness while he/she is eating the treats from your hand but leave it on him/her even after the treats are gone. Then toss the treats on the

floor/ground so that the dog has to move to get them. Do this for several sessions having the dog move farther and farther each session to get the treats while dragging the leash.

Step 7 – Once the dog is used to the feel of the leash dragging, you can start to pick up the leash as you feed the dog the treats. Then, while still holding the leash, toss the treats on the floor/ground and walk with him/her to the treats. Walk around like this, tossing the treats and walking with the dog. This will help the dog get used to the feel of you holding the leash and with you walking near him/her while doing so.

Step 8 – At this point you should be able to take the dog for a leash walk.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

A harness is better to use to walk dogs who are getting used to leash walks so that if the dog panics at any point on the walk from the pressure of the leash, he/she will not be choked by the tension on a neck collar.

Go slowly with this process. You might only have to do each step a few times or you may need to do each step many times. Every dog is different. Go at the dog's pace.