

Walks Without THE DRAMA

A small, fluffy dog with white fur and brown patches is walking on a pink leash. The dog is wearing a blue harness with a paw print logo. It is looking towards a squirrel on a white fence. The background is a sunny outdoor scene with a sidewalk, a lamppost, and some flowers.

I saw a
squirrel. I
stayed calm.
Mostly.

Less pulling, less lunging, more enjoyable walks

🐾 DOG PARENT LIFE 🐾

YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE HIDING BEHIND A PARKED CAR.

You see the other dog before your dog does. For one lovely second, you consider your options. Cross the street? Duck behind that SUV? Suddenly develop a passionate interest in somebody's hedge?

Then your dog notices. The leash goes tight, the barking starts, and somebody calls out, "Mine's friendly!" as though that settles the matter. By the time you get home, your shoulder aches and you're wondering why a walk around the block needs this much planning.

I'm glad you picked up this guide. Whether your dog tows you toward every lamppost, explodes at the sight of another dog, or both, you can have calmer walks. Not perfect walks. Calmer ones, where you have a plan, a way out, and a dog who's learning what pays.

We'll go one small, doable step at a time, and there will be no judging from this end of the leash. Frost, my husky, has opinions about practically everything and shares them at a volume usually reserved for public announcements.

Elin & Frost

About Elin

I grew up with family dogs, worked for years in a busy grooming salon and dog daycare in my twenties, and have fostered dogs of many breeds since. I'm not a veterinarian, certified trainer or behaviorist. The numbered sources at the back are the published guidance behind the facts in this book.

This guide is for general education and doesn't replace advice from your veterinarian or a qualified behavior professional. If your dog has bitten, nearly bitten, or is too strong to hold safely, get individual professional help before practicing around triggers. The stories illustrate the ideas; your dog's response sets the pace. **Walks Without the Drama** · Dog Parent Life · First edition · 2026

BEFORE YOUR NEXT WALK: 3 THINGS THAT HELP RIGHT AWAY

You don't need to fix every walk by tomorrow. You do need tomorrow's walk to go a little better. Start with these three.

- 1 Pick the boring route.** Choose a quieter time and a wider street with places to turn around, even if it's not your usual loop. **Why:** fewer surprises means fewer chances to practice pulling and lunging, and more chances to practice the good stuff.⁷
- 2 Swap to a comfortable harness and a regular leash.** A well-fitted harness and a fixed 4–6-foot leash give you more control without pressure on your dog's neck. Leave the retractable leash at home for now. **Why:** good gear makes the rest of this book easier to use.^{19,21}
- 3 Pay for the loose leash.** Every time the leash is slack, say a cheerful “yes” and hand over a tiny treat. When it tightens, stop and wait until it loosens before you move on. **Why:** right now, pulling gets your dog where they want to go. Starting tonight, the loose leash does.³



The goal: a loose leash, a happy dog, and a walk you both enjoy.

Red Flag: Call Your Vet

If your dog has suddenly started reacting, doesn't want to walk, or seems sore when you put the harness on, check in with your vet before starting training. Pain changes behavior.^{18,19}

Elin's Tip

Put a handful of tiny treats in your pocket *before* you pick up the leash. The best loose-leash moment is usually the first ten seconds out the door, and you'll miss it if you're still rummaging in the treat bag.

That's your head start. Now let's figure out what's really going on at the end of your leash.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

If **pulling is your main problem**, start with Chapters 2 to 5. If **barking, lunging or freezing are part of your walks**, read Chapters 6 to 9 before you practice anywhere near triggers. If **it's both**, teach walking skills somewhere easy while you make everyday walks more manageable.

Read a method all the way through before you try it. Pick one exercise, get your treats ready, and know where you'll go if you need to leave.

Elin's Tip

Practical shortcuts and reminders from my years of dogs.

Try This Today

One small action you can do today. Most have a matching printable at the back.

Red Flag: Call Your Vet

A health or safety concern that comes before any training exercise.

Myth vs. Fact

Popular advice, checked against the evidence, with something better to do instead.

The 30-day plan in Chapter 10 organizes your first month. Some dogs change quickly; many need longer. Go at your dog's pace, not the calendar's.

The six printables at the back are yours to print and reuse. Numbers in brackets point to the sources at the back.

Safety first: if your dog has bitten, nearly bitten, turned on you during a reaction, or is too strong to hold safely, get individual professional help before practicing around triggers. You don't have to finish a chapter before asking.^{7,18}

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YOUR DOG ISN'T TRYING TO EMBARRASS YOU

Start with a clear plan and a little less self-blame.



Walks get dramatic for two main reasons, and they need different fixes. Some dogs **pull**: they've learned that a tight leash gets them to the good smells faster. Others **react**: they bark, lunge or freeze when they see another dog, a person, a bike or a skateboard. Plenty of dogs do both.

A dog who understands loose-leash walking can still struggle when something scary or exciting appears, so we'll work on both: teaching your dog what to do with the leash, and helping them cope with the things that set them off.^{4,7}

Everything in this book uses rewards, sensible distance and smart changes to the walk. That follows the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior's recommendation of reward-based methods for training and behavior problems.^{1,2}

What we're working toward

Walking past a driveway with a loose leash. Seeing another dog across the park and turning away together, calmly. Choosing a quieter route without feeling like you've failed. Taking your dog outside without bracing for an incident.

Pulling, reacting, or both?

Check what sounds familiar. This is a starting point, not a diagnosis.

Mostly pulling

- ☐ My dog tows me toward smells, grass or other interesting spots.
- ☐ The leash stays tight even when nothing exciting is around.
- ☐ My dog zigzags or keeps crossing in front of me.

Start with Chapters 2 to 5: gear and loose-leash skills.

Possible reactivity

- ☐ My dog barks, lunges, growls or snaps when something appears.
- ☐ My dog goes very still or stares hard just before reacting.
- ☐ Once locked on, my dog struggles to look away.

Read Chapters 6 to 9 on body language, distance and trigger work, as well as the walking skills.^{7,8}

Both

- ☐ My dog pulls on ordinary walks and has bigger reactions to particular things.

That's very common. Practice walking skills in easy places, and make everyday walks more manageable while you do.

Elin's Tip

Pick a goal you can actually see. "Be better" is hard to practice. "Three steps together without the leash going tight" gives you something to notice and reward.

Before your next walk

- 1 **Choose an easier place.** Look for room to move away, not a narrow sidewalk with nowhere to go.
- 2 **Pick one small goal.** You're gathering information, not testing everything your dog knows.
- 3 **Give yourself permission to change the plan.** A different route, or heading home early, is a good decision, not a failure.

If your dog has bitten, nearly bitten, turned on you during a reaction, or is too strong to hold safely, get professional help before practicing around triggers. Chapter 9 explains how to find it.^{7,18}

Try This Today

Finish this sentence: "**One thing that would make our walks easier is _____.**" Keep it specific. We'll build from there.

WHY THE LEASH GETS TIGHT

Understand what your dog gets out of pulling.



Waffles, a doodle regular from my salon days, could spot a promising patch of grass from a remarkable distance. His nose pointed at it. His body followed. The person attached to him arrived shortly afterward.

From Waffles's end of the leash, the arrangement worked beautifully. So before you ask how to stop pulling, ask what happens *after* it.

Pulling pays

Your dog pulls toward a tree. You take a few steps forward. They reach the tree and sniff it. Pulling just got them exactly what they wanted. Repeat that a few hundred times and you have a dog who pulls. The reward doesn't have to come from your hand: getting to a smell, a person or a place is a reward too.³

You haven't ruined anything by walking forward. You were trying to get somewhere with a dog who hadn't learned a better deal. Our job is to make the loose leash the better deal.

What happens	What your dog learns
Tight leash gets them to the interesting spot	Pulling works
Loose leash gets them moving, sniffing or a treat	Staying close works
The rules change from walk to walk	Keep trying whatever worked before

Waffles's owner started rewarding a few loose steps with "go sniff!" before letting him reach the grass. By the end of that summer, he'd glance back at her before heading for a smell, not every time, but often enough that she noticed and so did her shoulder.

Your pace isn't their pace

Dogs naturally move faster than we do, and walking beside a person is a learned skill. Outside, smells and movement compete for their attention.⁴ That's why your dog can walk beautifully across the kitchen and fall apart beside a hedge that six dogs visited this morning. The place changed, so the difficulty changed.

We'll start where your dog can succeed, then add distractions gradually. You don't need to train at the busiest park gate to prove it's working.⁴

Excitement makes the first steps hardest

For some dogs, the leash coming off the hook announces the best part of the day, and they're already in a hurry by the time the door opens. For others, it's particular spots: the corner before the park, the driveway with the cat, the stretch where squirrels appear.

Notice where the pulling starts. Then you can practice *before* that spot, rather than waiting until your arm is fully extended.²¹

Pulling and reacting are different problems

Picture two dogs leaning into their harnesses. One wants to inspect a bush. The other has spotted a dog and is going stiff, staring and barking. Both leashes are tight, but the second dog needs more than a lesson about forward movement.

Fear, frustration and over-excitement can all drive reactions, and the leash can stop a dog from reaching something they want or getting away from something that worries them.⁷ You don't need to work out the exact emotion mid-encounter. If your dog is struggling, make space first. Loose-leash lessons can happen somewhere easier.

Myth vs. Fact

Myth: "If my dog walks ahead, they think they're in charge."

Fact: Walking ahead isn't a bid for rank. Good training focuses on the behavior, what keeps it going, and what you'd like instead.¹

Watch one ordinary moment

- 1 **Notice the destination.** Grass, a person, another dog?
- 2 **Notice what happened next.** Did pulling get them closer? Did something move away?
- 3 **Notice the body.** Loose and curious, or stiff, watchful and hard to interrupt?
- 4 **Write one sentence afterward.** "Pulled toward the hedge, then sniffed once we got there."

Use what happens naturally. Never set up a tricky encounter just to watch it.

Try This Today

Catch one moment when the leash is already loose. Say a cheerful "yes," hand over a treat your dog loves, and keep walking. Start noticing the version you'd like more of.³

GEAR THAT HELPS YOU TEACH

Choose equipment that fits your dog and makes teaching easier.



Bramble, a black Lab I fostered, came to me in a bargain harness that looked secure. On our first walk, a garbage truck rumbled past, Bramble backed up, and in two seconds she was standing on the sidewalk wearing nothing but a surprised expression. Luckily she stayed put. We went home, I did a proper fit check, and we started over with a better harness.

Gear can make walks easier. It still has to fit, suit the situation, and come with teaching. A product called “no-pull” hasn’t explained loose-leash walking to your dog.^{19,21}

Harnesses: fit before features

A harness takes pressure off your dog’s neck and spreads it across the body. Choose one that fits snugly without rubbing or restricting the shoulders. Head-shy dogs often prefer a style that clips around them instead of going over the head.^{19,22}

Back clip. Great for everyday walks, sniffing and long lines. It won’t stop pulling by itself; you’ll still need the skills in Chapter 4.

Front clip. The leash attaches at the chest, which can help you steer. Watch your dog walk in it: if it twists, catches a leg or shortens their stride, adjust it or choose another.

Both. A double-ended leash clipped to front and back gives extra control. It takes a little coordination, so practice indoors first.²¹

No harness should work by squeezing or causing pain.

The moving fit check

- 1 **Follow that harness’s fitting instructions.** Designs differ.
- 2 **Watch your dog stand, turn and walk.** Look for slipping straps, rubbing and awkward movement.
- 3 **Test it somewhere safe.** If your dog could back out, sort the fit before a street walk.
- 4 **Check the hardware.** Clips, stitching and adjusters wear out.
- 5 **Recheck after a walk.** A fit that looked fine standing still can shift on the move.^{19,22}

If your dog suddenly avoids the harness or seems sore when you put it on, stop and talk to your vet.¹⁹

Elin's Tip

Fit the harness to the dog you actually have. A shape that's perfect on a broad Lab can be a disaster on a skinny whippet.

Collars

A flat collar is essential for ID tags and fine for a dog who already walks nicely. For a dog who lunges or hits the end of the leash, start with a well-fitted harness instead. Collars should be snug but not tight.^{19,21}

Head halters: optional, with preparation

A head halter has one strap around the muzzle and one behind the head. Some people find it helpful with a big, strong dog, but it needs a slow, positive introduction.⁴ It isn't a muzzle, and it's never for leash corrections. Get help with fit and handling first, never let your dog hit the end of it at speed, and never jerk the leash. Clipping a second leash to a harness gives you a safe backup.²³

Introduce new gear in small steps

- 1 **Show it, then treat.** Put it away again.
- 2 **Reward curiosity.** Your dog can sniff and walk away.
- 3 **Invite them to put their nose through.** Hold it open and reward. Never push it on.
- 4 **Build up time wearing it** while your dog stays relaxed.
- 5 **Introduce straps and buckles separately.** Reward each easy step.
- 6 **Practice moving indoors** before adding a leash and going outside.

These are stages, not a schedule. If your dog freezes, paws at it or tries to escape, go back a step, or choose a different tool.

The everyday leash

For the training in this guide, use a **fixed 4–6-foot leash** with a clip sized for your dog. Tiny dogs don't need a heavy clip banging their chest; strong dogs need gear rated for their size. Shorten up *before* a narrow spot instead of reeling your dog in once they're there, and practice gathering and letting out slack smoothly.^{4,21}



Let your dog choose to put their nose through. No pushing, no grabbing.

Why I'd set the retractable leash aside

A retractable leash changes length constantly, which makes it hard to teach a consistent loose-leash boundary or to manage close encounters. For sidewalks, traffic and triggers, use the fixed leash. If you want to give your dog more room, use a long line in an open space.²¹

Myth vs. Fact

Myth: "Harnesses teach dogs to pull."

Fact: One lab study found shelter dogs pulled harder in a harness than a collar when straining toward food, but it didn't test everyday walks or training.⁵ Pulling is learned through what it gets the dog. A comfortable harness plus good teaching is still the best starting point.^{19,21}

Long lines: more room, more handling

A long line is a long, non-retractable leash for safe exploring in open spaces. Always clip it to a harness, not a collar, because a dog hitting the end at speed stops suddenly.¹⁴

- 1 **Choose a quiet, open area** away from roads and crowds.
- 2 **Let out only as much line as you can manage.**
- 3 **Keep loops away from legs**, yours and your dog's. Never wrap it around your hand.
- 4 **Move with your dog** so they don't build up speed toward the end.
- 5 **Gather it up early** if the area gets busy.

Gear I don't recommend

Prong collars, choke chains, shock collars and spray collars. AVSAB recommends reward-based methods and advises against aversive tools, and it reaffirmed that position in 2025.^{1,2} Research comparing training schools also found poorer welfare in dogs trained with aversive methods.¹⁶ If you've used one, no guilt needed. Switch to comfortable gear and start teaching what you want.



A long line clipped to the back of the harness gives safe room to explore.

Your gear decision chart

Your situation	Start with	Check
Everyday pulling	Well-fitted harness and fixed leash	Comfortable movement, secure fit
You want more control	Front-and-back harness, double-ended leash	Practice handling somewhere easy
Strong dog you can't safely hold	Professional help before hard outings	Gear alone may not make it safe
Sniffing in open space	Harness and long line	Room, line handling, no traffic
Hates gear over the head	Clip-around harness	Introduce straps gradually
Considering a head halter	Professional fitting and slow introduction	Comfort; no jerking
Bites or near-bites	Individual safety plan	Professional support; muzzle training (Chapter 9)

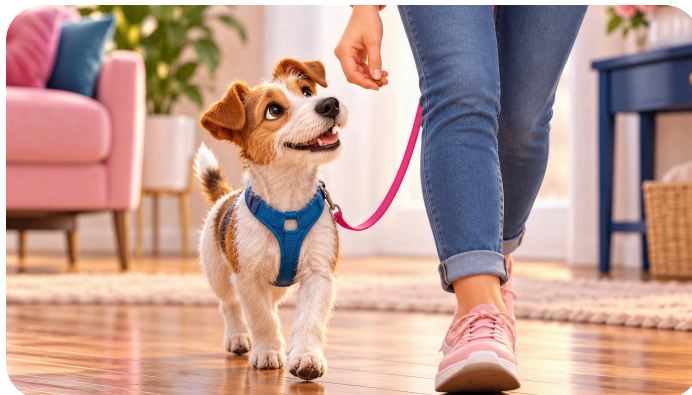
Bramble's new harness fit like it was made for her. By our second week, she'd trot to the door and stand still for it to go on, tail going, because harness meant walk. She never slipped out again.

Try This Today

Check your setup indoors: inspect the leash and clips, watch your dog move in the harness, and practice one comfortable gear step. Fix anything that doesn't fit before you add distractions.

TEACH THE WALK YOU WANT

Build loose-leash skills with methods you can actually repeat.



Ziggy, a wire-haired terrier I fostered, walked beside me across the kitchen like the star pupil in a training video. Then I opened the front door, and apparently the kitchen agreement didn't include sidewalks.

Skills need practice in new places, so every time you change location, go back to an easier version.⁴ You don't need every method here: start with the marker word and Method 1, then pick one or two more. If your dog is barking, lunging or locked onto something, that's a different problem; make space and see Chapter 7.⁷

What does “loose” mean?

A little slack in the leash, and nobody dragging anybody. Your dog can be a bit ahead, beside you or slightly behind. Pick one side for your first sessions; it makes treat delivery easier.⁴

Teach your marker word

A marker tells your dog exactly which moment earned the treat. I use “yes.” A clicker works too.

- 1 **Start somewhere quiet** with a few tiny treats.
- 2 **Say “yes,” then give a treat.** You're not asking for anything yet.
- 3 **Repeat a few times.** Same word, same tone.
- 4 **Use it for something easy.** When your dog looks at you, say “yes” and treat.

Once “yes” means a treat is coming, you can mark a loose leash the instant it happens.¹

Method 1: Reward the sweet spot

Best for: teaching your dog where it pays to walk.

- 1 **Stand with your dog on your chosen side,** leash loose.
- 2 **Deliver treats right beside your leg.** For small dogs, bend down or drop it by your foot.

- 3 **Take one step.** If your dog moves with you and the leash stays loose, mark and treat.
- 4 **Repeat one-step walks,** then two, then three.
- 5 **Treat before your dog drifts away,** not after.

You're teaching a good place to be, not demanding constant eye contact.⁴

Dog crosses in front of you? Check your treat hand. Deliver on the walking side. **Jumping?** Deliver lower and sooner. **Surging after each treat?** Go back to fewer steps and more treats.



Deliver the treat right beside your leg, and your dog learns that's the place to be.

Elin's Tip

Have the treat in your hand before you need it. Frost can cover an impressive amount of sidewalk while I argue with a zipper.

Method 2: Be a tree

Best for: pulling toward everyday smells and spots, when your dog is relaxed enough to learn.

- 1 **Walk with slack in the leash.**
- 2 **The moment it goes tight, stop.** Keep your hands steady. Don't jerk back.
- 3 **Wait for your dog to turn or step back** so the leash loosens. You can say their name or make a kissy noise to help.
- 4 **Walk on as soon as it's loose.**
- 5 **Reward loose steps** before the next pull happens.

Forward movement now comes from a loose leash.³ If nothing changes after a few seconds, don't stand there forever. Call your dog away, move somewhere easier, and practice shorter stretches. Never use this to hold a worried dog near a trigger.

Method 3: Turn and go

Best for: dogs who find moving easier than stopping.

- 1 Practice somewhere quiet first.
- 2 Say “this way” while the leash is still loose.
- 3 Turn smoothly and invite your dog along.
- 4 Mark and treat when they turn with you.
- 5 Walk a few easy steps before turning again.

Never march off while your dog is at the end of the leash; that turns it into a yank. If they don't follow, make the turn smaller and practice somewhere easier.¹⁵ You'll use this same move as an emergency exit in Chapter 7.

Method 4: Teach “let's go”

Best for: starting off together and leaving a sniff spot.

- 1 Say “let's go” indoors.
- 2 Take a step away.
- 3 Treat when your dog moves with you.
- 4 Practice in other easy places.
- 5 Try it outside after a boring sniff. Reward following, then sometimes let them go back for another sniff.

A food lure can help at first. Soon, say the cue *before* showing food and treat after your dog follows.^{15,21} If your dog ignores it, don't say it louder. Make it easier.

Method 5: Reward check-ins

In an easy spot, wait for your dog to glance at you, then mark, treat and let them go back to exploring. No sit, no staring contest.²¹

Method 6: Let sniffing pay

Best for: dogs who pull toward smells.

- 1 **Approach a safe sniff spot with room to spare.**
- 2 **Reward a few loose steps.**
- 3 **Say “go sniff!” and walk to the spot together.**
- 4 **Follow enough to keep the leash slack.**
- 5 **If it tightens, pause or back up, then try again.**

The smell becomes the reward for walking nicely.³ Just don't use greetings with strange dogs or people as automatic rewards; they get a say too.

Method 7: The “find it” reset

Best for: a quick change of activity on safe ground.

- 1 **Teach it indoors:** say “find it” and drop a few treats on the floor.
- 2 **Let your dog search.**
- 3 **Practice outside** in a quiet, clean spot.
- 4 **Afterward, invite a few easy steps together.**

Dogs Trust includes “find it” among its practical walking skills.²¹ Skip it near traffic, approaching dogs, litter, or if your dog guards food, and never use it to keep your dog in place while something scary approaches. Move away first.

Put it together

Start somewhere easy, reward a few loose steps, offer a sniff break, say “let's go,” and finish while it's going well. If your dog suddenly refuses to walk, get a health check.^{18,19} Ziggy and I spent a week on one-step walks in the yard before we tried the sidewalk again. By the end of the month, we could make it to the corner on a loose leash. There was the occasional detour for a particularly urgent leaf, but it was a whole new walk.

Try This Today

Choose one: reward a few one-step walks indoors, practice “this way” in a quiet room, or reward check-ins on a calm walk. Stop before either of you gets annoyed.

BUILD A BETTER WALK

Make room for sniffing, movement and a little practice.



Gus, the senior dachshund regular, could turn a small patch of grass into an appointment. You might have been ready to move on. Gus was still reading his messages.

His owner once confessed she used to hurry him along to “get the walk done.” When she started letting him have a few long sniff stops on purpose, something surprising happened: he pulled less on the way home. He’d had what he came for.

I think about dogs like Gus whenever a walk turns into a contest between the distance a person planned and what the dog actually enjoys. We need walks we can live with, and we need to leave room for the dog.

A walk can have different jobs

The everyday walk: toilet break, some safe sniffing, a short stretch of loose-leash practice, another sniff break.

The training walk: a quiet place, one skill, easy difficulty, and you leave before you’re tempted to “just try one more” harder thing.

The easy day: toilet breaks, gentle activity, a sniffing game at home, and plenty of rest.

These are examples, not exercise prescriptions. Your dog’s age and health matter, so ask your vet what’s right.¹²

Try a sniffari

A sniffari is simply a walk where your dog gets to choose more of the stops. You still set the safety rules: no investigating traffic, no pavement snacks, no towing you into someone’s yard.

- 1 **Choose a place with room,** like a quiet grassy area.
- 2 **Use a fixed leash,** or a long line if you have space and practice.
- 3 **Let your dog investigate.** Resist calling them away from every harmless smell.
- 4 **Move with them** to keep the leash slack.

5 Use “let’s go” when it’s time to move on. Reward following.

Sniffing is how dogs gather information about their world, and welfare guidance recommends giving them chances to use their noses.¹² One small study found dogs who did scent work became more optimistic in a test afterward than dogs who practiced heelwork.¹¹ That’s a good reason to sniff more. It doesn’t mean sniffing cures reactivity or replaces exercise.

Myth vs. Fact

Myth: “Ten minutes of sniffing equals an hour of walking.”

Fact: There’s no reliable formula for converting sniffing into exercise. Offer a mix of movement, sniffing and rest, and ask your vet about any health limits.^{11,12}

Quiet “decompression” walks

You may hear about decompression walks. Here, I simply mean a low-pressure outing with plenty of room and few demands. A remote trail isn’t automatically relaxing, though. If your dog worries about new places, wildlife or loose dogs, a predictable patch near home may suit them better.

Watch your dog: are they exploring loosely and easily switching activities, or scanning, freezing and struggling to move on? Choose the place your dog can handle, not the one that looks best in a photo.^{7,8}

Breed is a clue, not a prescription

A scent hound might love searches. A herding dog might enjoy a toy game in a secure area. Your senior might prefer a stroll and a long sniff. Try something, watch your dog, adjust. If activity causes stiffness, unusual tiredness or reluctance to walk, talk to your vet.^{12,19}

An easy day still needs a plan

Sometimes the sensible choice is to skip the hard route. Your dog still needs toilet breaks and something to do. Try a home search game:

- 1 **Settle your dog** somewhere comfy while you set up.
- 2 **Hide a few pieces of their usual food** in easy, visible spots.
- 3 **Invite them to “find it.”**
- 4 **Help if they get stuck.**
- 5 **Supervise**, and pick up anything they shouldn’t swallow.

Count food games as part of the day's food, and check with your vet about any dietary restrictions.¹²



A snuffle mat or a few hidden kibbles makes an easy day still feel like an adventure.

Elin's Tip

Don't turn the search into an entrance exam. The first few pieces can be completely visible. Your dog is allowed an easy win.

Rest is part of the routine

More activity isn't the answer to every difficult walk. Good enrichment includes rest, so let your dog settle without constantly offering the next game.¹² After a hard encounter, choose an easier outing next time. You don't need to go straight back and try the same situation again.

Try This Today

Add one safe, unhurried sniff stop to your next walk. Let your dog finish before you say "let's go," and notice how much easier the next stretch feels.

WHAT'S BEHIND THE BARKING AND LUNGING?

Learn to spot trouble before the outburst.



The bark gets everyone's attention. The moment before it is much easier to miss.

Juno, the nervous rescue pit mix from my daycare days, taught me to watch for the quiet changes: her mouth closing, her body going still, her eyes locking onto something ahead. If we turned away at that moment, she'd usually cope. If we waited for the bark, it was too late.

Those signs don't tell you everything a dog feels. They do give you a chance to act before things get harder. Body language makes the most sense when you look at the whole dog, what's going on around them, and how they're changing.⁸

"Reactive" describes what you see

People call dogs *reactive* when they bark, lunge or explode at particular things. It doesn't tell you why. Fear, frustration, over-excitement and habit can all play a part, and movement can trigger chasing too.⁷ One dog wants that other dog to go away. Another desperately wants to say hello. Some feel both, and it changes as the distance shrinks. From your end of the leash, it all looks like a lot of barking.

Fear: "I need more room"

A worried dog may try to move away, freeze, or bark and lunge as things get closer. The leash takes away the option of escaping.⁷ Don't test this by moving closer. Give room and note what you saw.

Frustration: "I want to get there"

Some dogs get worked up when the leash stops them from greeting a dog or person. These are sometimes called frustrated greeters. But barking and pulling toward another dog doesn't mean the greeting would be safe or welcome.^{7,15} Even very social dogs benefit from learning that seeing a dog doesn't always mean meeting one.

Bikes, skateboards and chasing

A bike or skateboard might be scary, exciting or something to chase. You don't need to figure out which while it's rolling toward you. Make space and keep your dog away from it. A qualified professional can help you plan practice later.⁷

Threshold: how much is too much?

Trainers talk about keeping a dog *under threshold*. That just means practicing at a level where your dog can notice what's going on without getting overwhelmed. It isn't a line painted across the park. Distance matters, but so do movement, noise and how long it lasts. A dog standing still far away is much easier than a dog running straight at you.^{6,7}

Instead of asking “Can my dog technically stay here?”, ask **“Is this a good place to practice?”**

Watch for changes, not one magic signal

What you notice	What to do
Loose body, normal sniffing, easy attention shifts	Keep going; keep it easy
Mouth closes, slows down, body stiffens, hard stare	Add more distance, ask for less
Can't look away, keeps scanning, sudden changes	Leave now, before the bark
Barking, lunging, snapping, frantic escape attempts	Get to safety; let them recover

Dogs differ, so use this as a guide, not a test.⁸ A dog standing still could be relaxed, concentrating or worried. Look at what came before and what happens next.

The treat test has limits

If your dog normally loves treats and suddenly won't take one, the situation is probably too much. But eating doesn't prove your dog is comfortable; some dogs grab food while staying tense and locked on.⁸ Also ask: can they look away on their own? Move with you? Is their body loosening or tightening? Do they go back to sniffing afterward?

Never hold a treat at your dog's nose to keep them near something they can't handle.

Distance changes from day to day

Your dog might cope with a dog across a wide field and fall apart on a narrow sidewalk. That doesn't make the field practice useless; the sidewalk is just harder. Write down distance *with* the situation:

“Could notice a still dog across the field, turn away and keep sniffing.” tells you far more than **“Fine at 40 feet.”**

Next time, start with plenty of room and check how your dog is doing that day. Gradual exposure means keeping things manageable, not following a fixed distance schedule.⁶

When stress piles up

Construction noise, then a barking dog, then a skateboard, then a neighbor leaning in to say hi. Trainers call this *trigger stacking*. Don't blame the last thing for the whole reaction. Notice what happened earlier, and whether your dog had calmed down in between.⁷ There's no set recovery time. Watch your dog, choose easier walks, and get help if they stay stressed.

Elin's Tip

"We saw the dog and left" is a successful walk. You don't have to wait for barking to justify giving your dog room.

When the leash makes it harder

The leash keeps everyone safe, but it also limits your dog's choices. Avoid holding your dog close to something scary while asking for sit after sit; sitting still doesn't change how they feel.^{6,7} Instead, make a wide arc, use a parked car or fence as a screen, or turn away early. We'll practice those moves in the next chapter.

Red Flag: Call Your Vet

If reactions start suddenly, get noticeably worse, or come with reluctance to walk or discomfort with the harness, don't assume more training is the answer. Pain and illness change behavior. Talk to your vet.^{18,19}

Start your trigger notes

Trigger: Dog behind a fence. **Where:** Narrow sidewalk; barking started before the driveway. **First sign:** My dog slowed and stared. **What helped:** Turning back and crossing where it was safe. **Next time:** Take the wider street before that house.

Juno's family kept notes like these for a few weeks. They found she coped well with dogs walking away from her and struggled with dogs coming toward her. So they picked routes and times that made head-on meetings rare, and the explosive walks became the exception instead of the routine.

Try This Today

On an easy walk, notice one change in your dog's body *before* the leash goes tight. If you see tension or a hard stare, add space. Write down what you saw once you're home.

HELP YOUR DOG HANDLE THEIR TRIGGERS

Practice exercises your dog can comfortably do.



Another dog appears across the park. Your dog notices. You notice your dog noticing. This is the moment you've been practicing for.

You don't need to get closer. You don't need every cue your dog knows. You need enough room, a clear next step, and permission to leave.

Pearl, a white poodle from our daycare, would spin and shriek at any dog on the horizon. Her owner started playing "Look at That" from the far side of a big park, where Pearl could see other dogs without losing it. After a few weeks, Pearl began glancing at a distant dog and then whipping her head back for her treat, as if to say, "Did you see that? Pay up." She still needed space, but now she could see a dog and stay with her person.

The exercises here do different jobs. Some change how your dog feels about a trigger. Others teach a useful response or get you out quickly. Start with one, in an easy setup, and add another once you understand the first.

Set up for success

Choose a spot with room to move away. Avoid gates, narrow paths and places where dogs pop up unexpectedly. Have your treats ready and know where you'll go if you need to leave.

For planned dog-to-dog practice, a calm helper dog and an experienced professional make things much more predictable. Never recruit a stranger's dog without asking.

If your dog has bitten, nearly bitten, turned on you during a reaction or is too strong to hold safely, get individual professional help before practicing around triggers.^{7,18}

Choose your starting exercise

If your dog...	Try	Watch out for
Notices a trigger and stays relaxed	Counterconditioning	You need control over distance
Can glance at a trigger and look back	Look at That	It turning into staring
Is ready to look away by choice	Engage–Disengage	Waiting while tension builds
Likes a predictable rhythm	1–2–3 pattern	It doesn't replace distance
Gets surprised by something	U-turn or barrier exit	It must be practiced first
Can search once you've made space	"Find it" scatter	Other dogs, litter, traffic

Exercise 1: The trigger predicts treats

Why: builds a better feeling about the trigger. This is called counterconditioning, and it works best at a distance your dog can handle.⁶ Your dog doesn't have to do anything to earn the food.

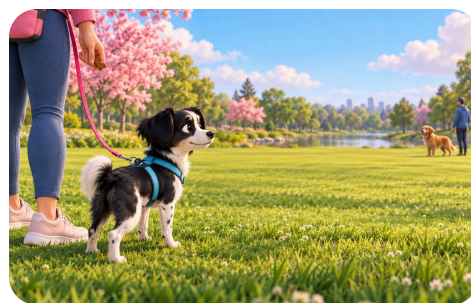
- 1 Start farther away than you think you need.** Your dog can notice the trigger without stiffening or locking on.
- 2 Let the trigger appear.** Don't lure your dog toward it.
- 3 Start feeding small treats** as soon as they see it.
- 4 When the trigger disappears, the treats stop.**
- 5 Pause and check.** Carry on only if your dog stays relaxed. Otherwise, leave.

The order matters: the trigger shows up, *then* the good stuff follows.^{6,17} If your dog barks, add distance; you don't need to withhold food as a punishment, but the setup needs to be easier. If your dog won't eat, move away and rethink. If your dog guards food or has dietary restrictions, ask a professional or your vet for an alternative.

Exercise 2: Look at That

Why: teaches a quick, calm look followed by checking back in. "Look at That" (LAT) was developed by trainer Leslie McDevitt in her Control Unleashed program.⁹

- 1 Start with something boring,** like a trash can. Mark a quick glance at it.
- 2 Say "yes" (or click), then treat** close to you.



A brief, relaxed glance at a faraway dog is exactly what you want to reward.

- 3 Repeat until your dog knows the game.
- 4 Try it with a trigger far away.
- 5 Mark a quick look before it becomes a stare, and treat where your dog can easily turn away.
- 6 Pause or move away between turns.

Don't point out dogs your dog hasn't noticed, and don't ask them to keep looking. If they can't turn back, add distance or call it a day. If a glance turns into a hard stare, you waited too long or you're too close.⁹

Exercise 3: Engage–Disengage

Why: moves your dog from noticing a trigger to choosing to look away. Trainer Alice Tong created this two-level game.¹⁰

Level 1: At a comfortable distance, mark the moment your dog notices the trigger, and treat close to you so they turn away. It's very like early LAT, so you don't need to teach both.

Level 2: Once Level 1 is easy, give your dog a moment to notice the trigger. If they turn back to you on their own, mark that and treat, then offer a break or more space.

If your dog stays locked on, don't wait them out. Move away and go back to Level 1.¹⁰ The goal is a relaxed choice, not winning a staring contest.

Exercise 4: The 1–2–3 pattern

Why: gives your dog a familiar, predictable rhythm. It's one of Leslie McDevitt's pattern games.²⁰

- 1 Start indoors. Count "one, two, three" out loud.
- 2 Treat on "three." Every time.
- 3 Keep the rhythm steady.
- 4 Add walking, still treating on "three."
- 5 Practice in other easy places.
- 6 Use it around mild distractions once it's familiar.

If your dog can't join in, move away. Don't count faster or use the rhythm to march them past something scary.

Elin's Tip

Practice the useful stuff when nothing is happening. A cue introduced during an emergency has a very demanding first day.

Exercise 5: The emergency U-turn

Why: gets you both out of there, fast and smoothly.

- 1 **Pick a cue.** “This way” works.
- 2 **Practice while walking somewhere quiet.**
- 3 **Say the cue and turn smoothly.**
- 4 **Encourage your dog to follow.** A treat at their nose helps early on.
- 5 **Treat as they turn with you.**
- 6 **Gradually fade the lure** so the treat comes after the turn.
- 7 **Rehearse it on ordinary walks** so it stays sharp.

Keep enough slack for your dog to turn. The cue is never permission to yank.¹⁵ In a surprise encounter, say the cue and head for your exit. If your dog is already reacting, safety and distance matter more than tidy technique.

Exercise 6: “Find it” scatter

Why: a familiar search game once you’ve made enough space. Teach it at home with an easy-to-see treat, practice in quiet places, then use it after you’ve moved away from a distraction. Stay alert while your dog searches.²¹

Skip it when another dog could rush in, your dog guards food, traffic or an approaching trigger makes stopping unsafe, the ground has hazards, or searching would slow your exit. A scatter isn’t a force field. Keep watching what’s coming.



Practice your U-turn on empty paths so it's automatic when you really need it.

Exercise 7: Parallel walking (optional)

Why: a calm, predictable experience near another dog. You need a willing helper, a calm dog and plenty of room, and it isn't right for every dog.¹⁵



A small scatter on clean grass gives your dog something easy and familiar to do.

- 1 **Start far apart**, walking in the same direction.
- 2 **Never walk straight toward each other.**
- 3 **Reward relaxed walking** and check-ins.
- 4 **Add space if either dog stiffens.**
- 5 **End without a greeting** if that's the right finish.

Getting closer is optional. A great session can stay at the starting distance. For dogs with any bite risk, work with a qualified professional.

When to make it harder

Look for several relaxed sessions in similar conditions. Then change just one thing: a bit longer, a new location, or a little less distance. Repeating an easy session is progress too.⁶

Try This Today

Practice your U-turn indoors: cue, turn, treat, stop after a few easy reps. Leave real triggers out of it for now.

WHEN THE NEIGHBORHOOD DOESN'T COOPERATE

Have a plan when your walk doesn't go to plan.



You pick a quiet time. You pack the treats. You turn the corner and find someone coming your way with a dog on a very long leash.

Preparation helps. It doesn't control the neighborhood. When something unexpected happens, you're allowed to switch from teaching to leaving. Your dog doesn't need a lesson at every hard moment.

Pickles the corgi, famous at the salon for his nail-trim commentary, had the same strong opinions about dogs appearing around corners. His owner and I made a deal: no more powering through. She practiced "this way" in the backyard until Pickles swung around at the first word, then used it every time a surprise dog appeared. Within a few weeks, most surprises ended with a quick turn and a treat instead of a corgi tantrum. The neighbors noticed too.

A surprise dog around the corner

- 1 Use your practiced turn cue.
- 2 Head back toward open space. Watch your footing and traffic.
- 3 Duck behind a screen if there's one nearby, like a parked car or solid fence.
- 4 Let the other dog pass without arranging a greeting.

If your dog reacts, keep heading for the exit. Asking for sit after sit only keeps you there longer.^{7,15} Once you're clear, choose a quieter route or head home.

A narrow sidewalk

Don't squeeze past if you can see it's too tight. Turn back, wait in an open spot, or cross where it's safe. Never step into traffic to save a training exercise. If you must wait, pick a spot with an exit, not one where your dog is pinned between a wall and the approaching trigger.

"Could you give us a little room, please?" You don't owe anyone an explanation.

An off-leash dog approaches

There's no single response that guarantees safety, but these help:

- 1 **Call clearly to the owner:** "Please call your dog!"
- 2 **Move toward a barrier or exit** if it's safe.
- 3 **Keep hold of your dog's leash.** Don't drop it as a strategy.
- 4 **Never put your hands between dogs** or grab an unfamiliar dog's collar.
- 5 **Leave as soon as you can.**



A parked car makes a great screen while another dog passes.

Don't automatically toss treats between the dogs; it can start a squabble or encourage the other dog to stick around. If loose dogs keep making a route unsafe, choose another place to walk while you work on a longer-term plan.⁷

Neighbors who insist on saying hi

Some people hear "we're training" as an invitation to help. Try: **"No greeting today, thanks."** **"Please stop there. We need space."** **"Please don't reach for him."** Keep moving as you say it. You don't need to stand still while someone debates you. Greetings should work for both dogs and both people; being friendly doesn't mean anyone has to meet.¹⁴

Children

Keep enough space that children can't suddenly reach your dog. Never ask an unfamiliar child to offer treats or help test your dog. **"Please stop there. We're giving him room."** A dog who might lunge or bite needs an adult handler. If you can't reliably prevent contact, get professional help before using that route.^{7,18}

Bikes, scooters and skateboards

Watch for movement early. Step well off the path, keep your dog on the side away from the traffic, and use a familiar exercise only if your dog can do it comfortably. Otherwise, turn away or leave. Don't practice right beside moving traffic or ask a rider to keep passing your dog; real training needs more control and more distance.⁷

Vet visits

Call ahead if your dog struggles with other animals, handling or waiting rooms. Ask if you can wait in the car and come straight in when the team is ready, and mention any bite history. Many clinics now use fear-reducing approaches like gradual preparation and lots of treats, rather than forcing dogs through scary experiences.¹⁷ Ask your vet how to make visits easier.

Pet stores

Pet stores are optional. Crowded entrances and narrow aisles are hard for many dogs, and buying dog food doesn't require bringing the dog. Practice in easier places first, then try a short visit at a quiet time, if you want to at all.

Elin's Tip

"We left" is a perfectly respectable entry in a walk log. You noticed a problem and made a good decision.

After something goes wrong

Get somewhere safe first, and review later. What appeared? What was the earliest sign? Where could you have made space? What would make that route easier next time? If your dog bit, nearly bit or turned on you, get professional help, and don't recreate the situation to see if it happens again.¹⁸

Try This Today

Look at your usual route and pick two escape options: a side street, a quiet turnaround, or a spot where you can wait behind a parked car or fence.

SAFETY, SETBACKS AND GETTING HELP

Keep everyone safe while your dog learns.



A basket muzzle on the kitchen table can stir up a lot of feelings. You might worry what people will think, or feel sad that walks need one more piece of gear. Your dog has a much simpler question: *what happens when this thing shows up?* We can make the answer pleasant and predictable.

Rosie, a hound mix I fostered, had a history of snapping at dogs who got too close, so a muzzle was part of her walking gear from day one. We made it a game: muzzle appears, cheese appears. Within a couple of weeks, she'd shove her nose in so eagerly I had to laugh. We still gave other dogs plenty of room, but everyone was safer while she learned, and her adopters took home a dog who loved her muzzle.

A muzzle is a safety tool, not a label

A well-fitted basket muzzle lowers bite risk while letting your dog pant, drink and take treats. Design and fit matter: some muzzles don't protect well, and a muzzled dog can still knock someone over.^{13,17} A muzzle doesn't make close encounters a good idea. Keep using distance and management.

For walks, choose a basket style that allows a full pant, and get fitting help, especially for flat or narrow faces. Never leave a muzzled dog alone, and don't use tight fabric muzzles that hold the mouth shut for walks.^{13,17}

Teach your dog to love the muzzle

Go at your dog's pace, in a quiet room, and let them move away whenever they want.

- 1 **Show the muzzle, give a treat,** then put it away.
- 2 **Reward looking at it** or moving toward it.
- 3 **Hold it still and invite your dog to put their nose in.** Never push it on.
- 4 **Build time with their nose inside.** Feed treats through the front (squeeze cheese or a lickable treat works well).
- 5 **Touch and move the straps** separately, with treats.
- 6 **Practice the buckle sound** away from their head if needed.

7 Fasten briefly, treat, unfasten, and let them back out.

8 Practice moving around indoors while wearing it.

9 Gradually try it on easy outdoor walks.

Progress based on comfort, not the calendar. If your dog freezes, backs away or keeps pawing at it, go back a step.¹³ And never introduce it for the first time just before a situation your dog already finds hard.

Elin's Tip

Put muzzle practice on the same list as harness practice. Show the gear, make something good happen, let your dog choose.

Manage walks while you train

Choose quieter times and routes, walk household dogs separately if needed, and on hard days swap the tough route for easy outings and games at home.^{7,12} Management isn't failure. It's what makes training possible.

Habits that make things worse

Yanking when a trigger appears. If seeing another dog predicts a painful jerk, your dog has even more reason to dislike other dogs. Use distance and rewards instead.^{1,15}

Punishing growls. A growl is a warning: "I'm uncomfortable." Punishing it doesn't fix the reason and can teach your dog to skip the warning. Make space and figure out what's going on.¹⁴

Forcing greetings. Holding your dog still while another dog approaches takes away their options. You can always say no thanks.^{7,14}

Flooding. Keeping a scared dog in an overwhelming situation until they stop reacting isn't training. A dog who goes quiet isn't necessarily calm, and flooding can make fear worse.^{6,17}

When to get professional help

- Your dog has bitten or nearly bitten a person or animal.
- Your dog turns on you, the leash or another household dog during reactions.
- You can't safely hold or move your dog.
- Reactions are getting worse, or your life is shrinking around them.
- Your dog stays stressed even after you've changed the setup.
- You're not sure what you're seeing.

You don't have to wait for an injury.¹⁸

Red Flag: Call Your Vet

Sudden behavior changes, reluctance to walk, sensitivity to handling or the harness, or reactions that get worse for no clear reason can all have a medical cause. Don't assume your dog is being difficult.

Talk to your vet.^{18,19}

Who does what?

Your vet checks for medical causes and can refer you on. **A veterinary behaviorist** is a vet with specialist training in behavior who can look at medical and behavioral factors together and build a treatment plan, including medication if it's appropriate.¹⁸ **A qualified reward-based trainer or behavior consultant** helps with handling, setups and practical skills. A title is a starting point for questions, not proof of good methods.

Questions to ask before you book

- “What happens if my dog barks or lunges during a session?”
- “What equipment will you use or require?”
- “How will you decide when to make things harder?”
- “Can we start somewhere my dog can cope?”
- “Will I get a written plan to practice at home?”
- “When would you refer us to a vet or veterinary behaviorist?”



A good trainer will happily explain their methods and start where your dog can cope.

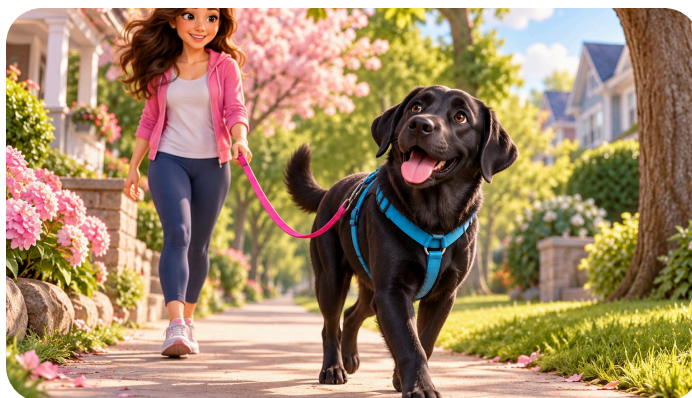
Look for answers about distance, rewards and adjusting the environment. Walk away from guarantees, painful equipment, talk of “dominance,” or promises to fix a complex problem in a set number of sessions.^{1,2} Bring notes, but never provoke a reaction to film it; record behavior only when it's safe.¹⁸

Try This Today

Pick one safety step: start muzzle practice, swap a route that has nowhere to turn, book a vet visit for a behavior change, or contact a reward-based professional. Put it on your calendar.

YOUR NEXT 30 DAYS

A flexible plan, at your dog's pace.



A good walk-log entry doesn't have to sound impressive. **"Saw a bicycle. Turned with me. Sniffed afterward."** I'd be thrilled to write that down. It tells you what happened, what your dog could do, and that they got back to normal. That's more useful than deciding whether the whole walk was "good" or "bad."

When Bramble, my black Lab foster, went to her new family, I sent her log along with her. Her first week said things like "Pulled toward every smell. Practiced one-step walks in the yard." Her last week said "Walked to the park and back. Leash mostly loose. Stopped for a long sniff at the mailbox." It wasn't a straight line in between, but reading those two pages side by side made the progress obvious.

This plan gives your practice structure. It doesn't promise that pulling or reactivity will be solved in 30 days; the right pace depends on your dog and your situation.¹⁸ Repeat days. Repeat weeks. Skip anything that doesn't fit.

Choose your track

Your main problem	Focus most of your practice on
Pulling, no big reactions	Treat placement, loose steps, sniff rewards, direction cues
Reactivity	Easier walks, watching body language, exits, careful trigger work
Both	Walking skills somewhere easy, plus separate trigger work
Bite risk or unsafe handling	Professional guidance before any trigger practice

You don't need a new exercise every day. Familiar practice is allowed to stay familiar.

Days 1–7: Set up for success

Your aim: comfortable gear, easier walks and a starting point.

Day 1: Check harness fit and leash hardware. Practice putting the gear on calmly. **Day 2:** Plan your easy route, including places to turn, wait or hide behind a car. **Day 3:** Teach your marker word. **Day 4:** Find the sweet spot: treat beside your leg, standing still, then one step. **Day 5:** Teach "this way" indoors. **Day 6:** Take an easy sniffing walk. **Day 7:** Review: what was easy, what was hard, and what's one thing to adjust?

If putting on the gear seems to hurt, or your dog's behavior has changed, talk to your vet.¹⁹

Days 8–14: Build everyday skills

Your aim: short loose-leash stretches and a reliable exit.

Day 8: Reward loose steps in your easiest spot. **Day 9:** Practice “let’s go” after a boring sniff. **Day 10:** Rehearse your U-turn somewhere quiet. **Day 11:** Teach “find it” on safe ground. **Day 12:** Combine a short loose-leash stretch with a sniff reward. **Day 13:** Repeat your easiest exercise, or take an easy day. **Day 14:** Review your notes.

If it falls apart outside, go back to the easier place. Your dog hasn’t forgotten; they just need a smaller step between the kitchen and the sidewalk.⁴

Days 15–21: Take the next step

Your aim: one new challenge, while your dog stays relaxed.

Pulling track: practice familiar skills in a new, quiet place, with lots of treats and short stretches.

Reactivity track: if it’s safe, try brief trigger work with plenty of distance and an exit, using one exercise from Chapter 7, or bring in a professional. **Both:** keep walking practice and trigger work separate so you can tell what’s working.

Day 15: Choose your setup and exercise. **Day 16:** Try a short, easy session. **Day 17:** Easy walk and review. **Day 18:** Repeat the same setup if it went well. **Day 19:** Practice your emergency U-turn, no triggers. **Day 20:** Repeat an easy win, or take an enrichment day. **Day 21:** Review before changing anything.

You never have to shrink the distance on a schedule. Gradual exposure follows your dog’s response.⁶

Days 22–30: Make it your routine

Your aim: a routine you can keep going.

Day 22: Repeat your strongest skill. **Day 23:** Try it in one new easy place. **Day 24:** Rehearse an exit and check your gear. **Day 25:** Plan a walk around sniffing. **Day 26:** Repeat trigger work or loose-leash practice. **Day 27:** Easy day. **Day 28:** Compare your notes with Week 1. **Day 29:** Pick the skills and routes you want to keep. **Day 30:** Write your next small goal.

What counts as progress?

- More check-ins your dog offers on their own.
- More stretches with a loose leash.
- Spotting earlier when your dog needs space.
- Moving away from distractions more easily.
- Getting back to sniffing sooner after an encounter.
- A routine you can keep without dreading the next walk.

Note the conditions too. A quiet field and a busy sidewalk are different tests.

Repeat, make it easier, or get help

Repeat when it's going well but needs more practice. **Make it easier** when your dog stares, stiffens or can't join in: change the place, distance or length. **Get help** when safety is uncertain, reactions are getting worse or stress isn't easing. Sudden changes or signs of pain need your vet.^{18,19}

Elin's Tip

You don't owe the calendar a harder exercise. If Tuesday's practice worked, Wednesday can look exactly the same.

Try This Today

Fill in Day 1 on your tracker. Write what you actually did, even if it was "checked harness fit and practiced one calm buckle."

MY DOG'S TRIGGER LIST

Record what happens without setting up a reaction to measure it.

Dog's name: _____

Started on: _____

Trigger	Setting or conditions	Earliest change I notice	Approximate workable distance*	What helps / exit option

Distances change with the situation. Start with plenty of room each time.

Before I practice

- ☐ My equipment is secure and comfortable.
- ☐ I can move away safely.
- ☐ My dog can notice the surroundings without becoming fixed or tense.
- ☐ I have an exit plan.
- ☐ I'm prepared to stop.

Things that made the situation harder:

My next adjustment:

Professional contact, if needed:

OUR WALK LOG

Record the conditions, the response and one useful detail.

Dog's name: _____

Date / time	Route and conditions	Triggers and approximate distance	Response / recovery observations	Win or next adjustment

This week's useful observations

An outing that suited my dog:

The earliest sign I noticed:

An exercise that felt manageable:

Something I'll change:

One small win I don't want to forget:

No video, measurement or note is worth compromising safe handling. Write afterward.

MY 30-DAY PRACTICE TRACKER

Repeat, rest and adjust whenever needed.

Dog's name: _____

Starting date: _____

My main track:

☐ Pulling · ☐ Reactivity · ☐ Both · ☐ Professional plan

My small goal: _____

Key: P = practice · E = easier/enrichment day · A = adjusted plan

Day	Done	P / E / A	What we practiced or changed
1	☐		
2	☐		
3	☐		
4	☐		
5	☐		
6	☐		
7	☐		
8	☐		
9	☐		
10	☐		
11	☐		
12	☐		
13	☐		
14	☐		
15	☐		

Day	Done	P / E / A	What we practiced or changed
16	☐		
17	☐		
18	☐		
19	☐		
20	☐		
21	☐		
22	☐		
23	☐		
24	☐		
25	☐		
26	☐		
27	☐		
28	☐		
29	☐		
30	☐		

Keep practicing: _____

Make easier: _____

My next small goal: _____

Repeat days whenever you need to. Your dog sets the pace.

CHOOSE YOUR WALKING GEAR

Start with fit, comfortable movement and safe handling.

Situation	Consider	Check before using
Everyday pulling	Well-fitted harness and fixed 4–6-foot leash	Fit, hardware and freedom of movement
Additional handling support	Front/back attachment harness and double-ended leash	Practice coordination in a contained, easy space
Identification	Secure flat collar and current ID	Fit and wear
Quiet exploration	Harness and manageable long line	Space, line handling and no nearby traffic
Discomfort with over-head equipment	Clip-around harness	Gradual introduction to straps and buckles
Head halter under consideration	Individual fitting and handling advice	Positive conditioning; no jerking or sudden stops
Escape risk	Professional fit check; suitable backup connection	Secure attachment without restricting movement
Bites, near-bites or unsafe handling	Individual safety plan; suitable conditioned muzzle when appropriate	Professional support before planned trigger work

My equipment check

- ☐ Correct size and rating for my dog.
- ☐ No damaged stitching, straps or clips.
- ☐ Secure without rubbing or awkward movement.
- ☐ My dog is comfortable having it put on.
- ☐ I can handle the leash without wrapping it around my wrist or fingers.
- ☐ I've practiced any unfamiliar setup somewhere easy.

My current setup: _____

What needs adjusting: _____

Who can help me check it: _____

Equipment supports teaching. Painful or frightening equipment isn't part of this plan.

Emergency Moves

Practice these before you need them. Use space and a safe exit first.

Card 1: U-Turn

Cue: _____

1. Say your practiced cue.
2. Turn toward available safe space.
3. Encourage your dog to move with you.
4. Reward following when practical.
5. Keep moving until you have enough room.

Remember: Check traffic and footing. Don't jerk your dog through the turn.

Card 2: Find It

1. Use only where stopping is safe.
2. Say "find it."
3. Place a small reward on safe ground.
4. Let your dog locate it.
5. Stay alert and move on when needed.

Remember: Practice first in easy places. Don't use food to keep your dog beside something frightening.

Card 3: Small Scatter

1. Create space first.
2. Check for approaching dogs, hazards and traffic.
3. Scatter a few small pieces over a manageable area.
4. Watch the surroundings while your dog searches.
5. Leave before the situation becomes difficult again.

Skip it: Food guarding, competing dogs, unsafe ground or an urgent need to leave.

Card 4: Barrier and Exit

1. Identify a solid visual barrier or wider route.
2. Move toward it when safe.
3. Give the trigger room to pass.
4. Leave without arranging a greeting.

Useful words: "Please call your dog back." · "No greeting today, thanks." · "Please stop there. We need space."

My usual exit options: _____

No emergency move guarantees safety. Bites, near-bites or unsafe handling need individual professional support.

CHOOSING A TRAINER OR BEHAVIOR PROFESSIONAL

Ask what they will do, especially when your dog struggles.

Professional's name: _____

Website / contact: _____

Methods and experience

- ☐ Uses reward-based methods.
- ☐ Has experience with my dog's particular difficulties.
- ☐ Explains qualifications and their limits clearly.
- ☐ Asks about health, bite history and safe handling.
- ☐ Adjusts distance, duration and surroundings to the dog.
- ☐ Explains when veterinary or specialist support is needed.

What sessions will look like

- ☐ Equipment and methods are explained before use.
- ☐ The starting environment is manageable for my dog.
- ☐ I'll receive instructions I can follow at home.
- ☐ There is a plan for stopping or simplifying an exercise.
- ☐ Progress is based on observations rather than guaranteed dates.
- ☐ My concerns and my dog's discomfort will be taken seriously.

Questions to ask

“What happens if my dog barks or lunges?”

“What equipment will you require?”

“How will you decide when to make practice harder?”

“When would you refer us to a veterinarian or veterinary behaviorist?”

Reasons to keep looking

- ☐ Guaranteed results or a fixed deadline for resolving a complex problem.
- ☐ Required shock, prong, choke or spray equipment.
- ☐ Dominance, intimidation or forced exposure.
- ☐ Dismissal of pain, fear or safety concerns.
- ☐ Pressure to continue when my dog cannot cope.

My next step: _____

SOURCES

Links checked October 2026. “n.d.” means the page showed no clear publication date. Named training games are practitioner methods built on learning science, not individually tested in controlled trials. Example practice amounts are teaching suggestions.

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MORE FROM DOG PARENT LIFE

If you're ready for another useful read, here's what else is on the shelf:

- **100 Dog Facts**, our free ebook: why your dog does all the weird stuff they do.
- **The Quiet Dog Guide**: why your dog barks, and how to turn the volume down. A perfect partner if your walks come with a soundtrack.
- **Calm When I'm Gone**: helping your dog handle alone time, one small step at a time.
- **The Happy Coat Handbook**: grooming at home for every coat type.

Keep the printables you use. Repeat the exercises that help. And when your dog finds an especially interesting patch of grass, give them a moment if you can.

Elin & Frost

dogparentlife.com · [@dog.parent.life](https://www.tiktok.com/@dog.parent.life) on TikTok and Instagram

This guide is for general education and doesn't replace advice from your veterinarian or a qualified behavior professional.