

DIGGITY-DOG STOP THIS PESKY BEHAVIOUR, STAT!

# DOGS *life*

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What you need to know

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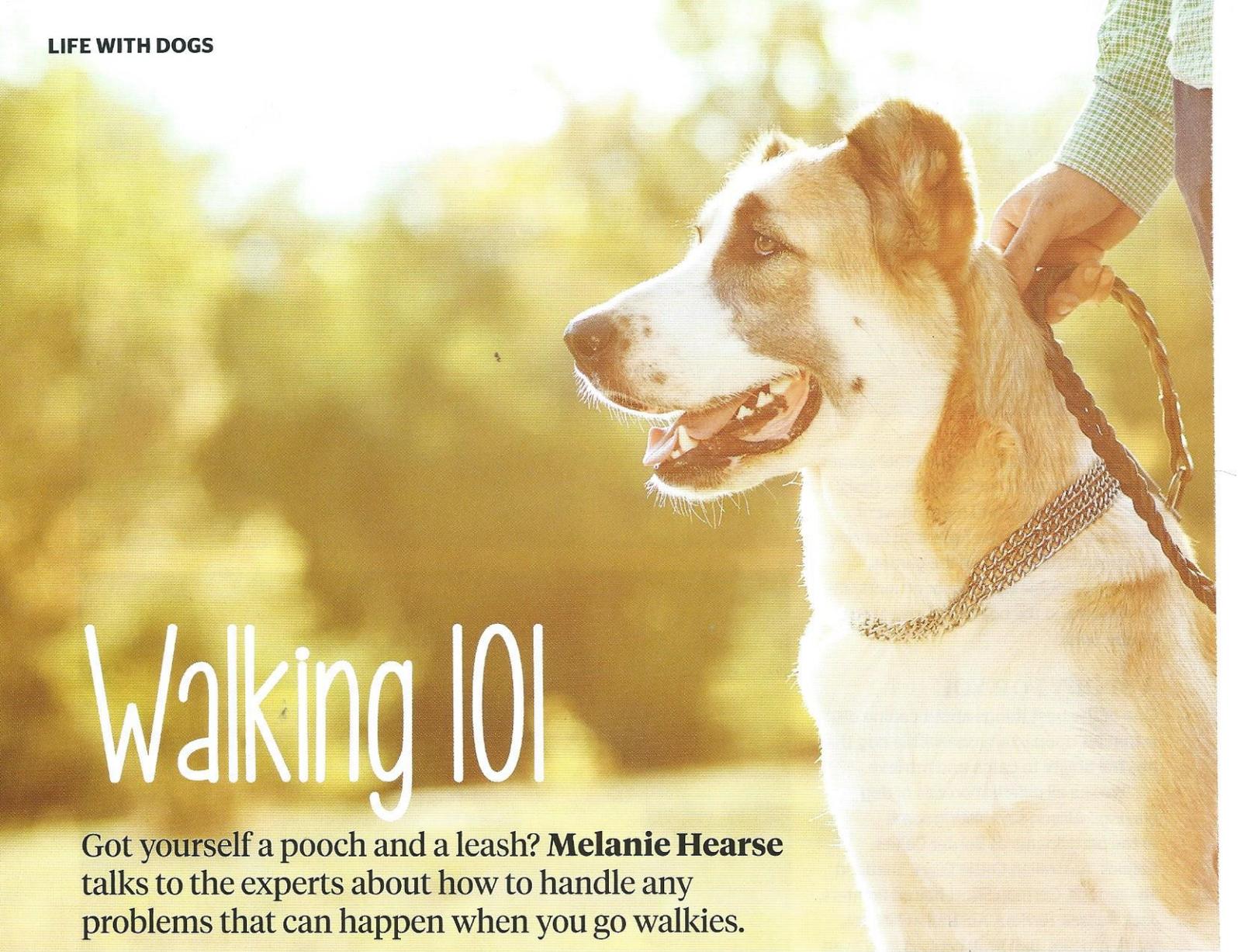
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# Walking 101

Got yourself a pooch and a leash? **Melanie Hearse** talks to the experts about how to handle any problems that can happen when you go walkies.

**N**othing makes a dog's tail and body say "oh boy, oh boy, oh boy" like bringing out the leash and getting them ready to go for a walk. For your four-legged friend it means meeting people, sniffing the trees and getting in a great run — all big doggie treats. While walking your dog should be an enjoyable experience for both parties, sometimes this is hindered by undesirable behaviours such as pulling or lunging, mouthing the leash or on-leash aggression, says Katie Catherwood, director at Heads and Tails Pet Care Services.

## STOP THE PULLING

Pulling on the leash is one of the most common problems when it comes to leash walking; even some of the best-behaved dogs can struggle with it. And just why do they engage in this frustrating behaviour?

"Because they can. More to the point,

because they don't think there is anything wrong with it. In fact, some owners inadvertently teach their dogs that they *should* pull on lead through negative reinforcement," says Katie. "Dogs don't understand that by pulling on the leash, they are causing their owners discomfort and frustration. All they see is that they are getting closer to their goal in a shorter space of time."

Katie says when it comes to pulling on the leash, prevention is better than cure. "It's ideal for your dog to practice wearing a collar and leash as early as he or she comes home, and preferably before you actually need to use them in public. As a puppy, your dog will naturally be much lighter and easier for you to physically control, too," she says. If this time has already passed, however, you may have some pre-established habits to overcome — not to mention you're no doubt working with a much larger dog and will require

some additional training tools, such as a walking harness.

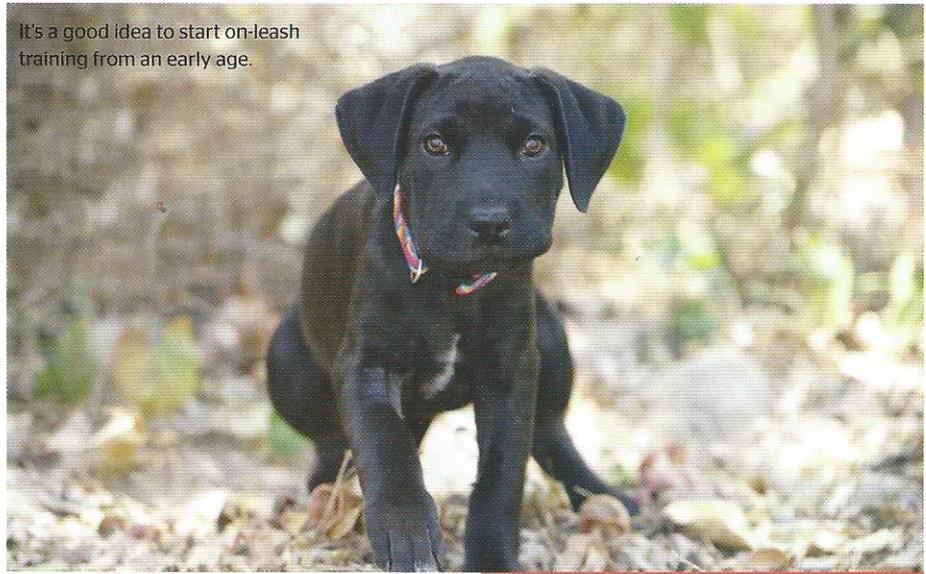
When it comes to modifying your dog's behaviour, Katie recommends putting your focus on what you are teaching your dog to do rather than what you're teaching them not to do. "For instance, rather than training your dog not to pull on the leash, alter your perspective and train your dog to walk alongside you. The outcome is the same, but when you reframe the situation like this, it immediately becomes positive and promotes encouragement rather than punishment," she says.

## MASTERING YOUR TRAINING TECHNIQUE

Training sessions should be short, frequent and fun, and patience is paramount. Do be mindful that your dog is a dog and, as such, he will naturally walk faster than you and at an uneven pace. To a dog, this is normal. "Think

Your dog should walk with you, not pull ahead.

It's a good idea to start on-leash training from an early age.



praise (such as "heel" or "steady") when your dog is doing a great job, so he or she understands the name of the command.

"Don't rely on your leash to change your dog's direction. The aim is to have your dog walking alongside you because he *wants* to, not because he is being forced to," says Katie.

### OTHER WALKING MANNERS

Responsible dog ownership comprises both written and unwritten rules. "Technically there are no guidelines around right of way for dog walking, but it is both polite and wise to give other walkers space, unless it is mutually agreed by both parties that an approach is desired," Katie says. "This goes for both on- and off-leash areas. There is no problem allowing two dogs to meet as long as both feel comfortable doing so, and it is up to the owners to read the body language and assess whether this is the case. If a dog poses a genuine threat to other dogs or people, he or she should be wearing a muzzle and the owner is strongly advised to seek assistance with behavioural coaching," she says.

And when it comes to right of way on walking spaces, generally the rule is riders give way to walkers, and walkers should allow one another enough room to pass without meeting, if needs be. "Instinctively, many dogs will be interested in the passers-by, but if you have put in the work around loose-lead walking and sit/stay commands, there shouldn't be an issue. This definitely comes down to practice and persistence." **DL**

### WALKING YOUR DOG AND THE LAW

Councils differ slightly on their legal obligations around responsible dog ownership and management within public areas; however, generally owners are required to comply with the following regulations:

- Pick up after your dog.
- Carry enough poo bags to pick up after each dog (generally three to four per dog is a safe bet).
- Carry a leash at all times (one leash per dog). Usually this refers to a standard fixed-length (not flexible/reel) leash, approximately 120cm long max.
- Do not allow your dog to threaten or worry any person or animal.
- Dogs to be exercised off-leash only within designated off-leash areas.
- Maintain a safe distance from playgrounds, barbeque areas and organised sporting events.
- Maintain effective voice or hand signal control over your dog when off-leash.
- Aggressive dogs are to be managed with appropriate measures sufficient to prevent them from causing harm to others.
- Ensure that your dog has a current registration within your municipality.
- In some areas, councils impose a limitation on the number of dogs being handled per person.

For specific rules, check your local council website for their guidelines around responsible dog ownership.

of the last time you tried to pick up a new and unusual skill. How long did it take you to master it? Now imagine you learnt it in a different language, and then suppose your instructor became frustrated with you. It certainly wouldn't help," says Katie. As the teacher, your job is to create opportunities for your dog to succeed, so choose an environment that is free of distractions and where you and/or your dog's wellbeing (or time-constraints) do not rely on their ability to achieve the task. Be consistent and use small, high-value rewards.

And how do you nail excellent walking-on-the-leash behaviours? Entice your dog with encouragement and rewards to walk next to you while you move in a figure eight pattern, making sure you always step off on the same foot when you would like the dog to follow you (and the opposite one when you would like the dog to "stay"). Pair a verbal cue with your