

CHOOSE TO HEEL

Developing a good loose leash walking relationship with your dog is a process....not a simple behavior such as “sit.” It will require multiple approaches, lots of practice, and **patience**. One approach which many handlers have found helpful is called “choose to heel.” Five minutes of practice a day can teach your pup that by your side is the happy place where all good things happen. The secret here is to understand that the operative word is **choose**. You make it fun and rewarding for the puppy when he chooses to heel.

This can only be done in a safely enclosed and distraction free environment. I do it in the house every morning with the older dogs closed in the back bedroom. You must have lots of small treats readily available to your left hand. I dish up my pup’s breakfast kibble, set it on the counter, and fill both hands with kibble (the right hand will replenish your supply in your left hand).

1. First, you have to let the pup know you have treats in your left hand....will always have treats in the left hand. Start by facing the pup and simply “Pezzing” – feeding the pup treat after treat from your left hand as you say “yes.”
2. Now, hold the left hand out but drop it to your left side. The pup should come immediately to your side, and when he does, immediately say “yes” as you treat.
3. Give him several more treats with a yes as long as he stays right there by your left side. DO NOT CALL OR LURE. Just wait patiently with the treat in the left hand dropped by your side. He’ll show up. When he does, say yes and treat.
4. Now take a step or two directly back. If your timing is good and you still have his attention, he’ll follow you and show up by your left hand. Immediately say “yes” and treat!
5. Take a couple more steps back keeping your left hand by your side and treating him there, then take a step or two forward (remember to stand up straight and look where you are going). The pup should whirl around and follow your left hand. IMMEDIATELY pop a treat in his mouth with an enthusiastic “yes”. Remember, your hand must stay at your side. He CHOOSES to come there for the treat, and every time he does, he gets a “yes” and a treat.
6. Begin to walk around the room. STAND UP STRAIGHT. Don’t look at the dog or lean toward him. Don’t call him in any way. Just walk quickly (fast is more interesting to a pup) and be ready to say YES and treat from your left hand every time he shows up. If he gets a little lost, you can turn left toward him so you “just happen” to pass him with your left hand near him. But don’t lean and don’t look directly at him. Look like a leader.

7. Remember, our pups like movement, so don't go too slow. You must not call him, but your movement will attract his attention.
8. As soon as he begins to regularly show up in heel position (he's getting the idea that this is the good place to be), add "yes, good heel" to your praise. When he is really attached to your side, make it more fun with turns and maybe even a little jogging.

If you dedicate 5 minutes every morning to this little exercise, you can firmly establish in your pup's brain that your left side is a fun and happy place to be. You are creating a pattern of behavior.

Once this is firmly established, you can call your pup to heel at odd times like right after he went "busy" (assuming you have a fenced yard and he is off lead). Always have treats in your pocket and be ready with a quick "Yes! Good heel" whenever he chooses to show up at your left side