Why do dogs pull on the leash? The quick and simple answer is….because it works for them to get places. When the dog pulls to get somewhere and we follow, he gets inadvertently reinforced. It will get to a point without training that he may start to pull very hard that it makes it very unpleasant to take your dog for a walk. Some people give up walking their dog that pulls like a freight train when on leash because of embarrassment, danger and sometimes pain. The more you keep pressure on trying to keep the dog from pulling, the more your dog will try to pull. There is a term for this, opposition reflex. It is normal as humans that if we lean against someone, the other person will lean back in. Actually dogs probably think that humans must like walking with a tight leash because it is done all the time. Training your dog to walk well on a leash is important for so many reasons. To me, it doesn’t matter if they are in front of me, behind me, or beside me, just as long as the leash is loose and they aren’t pulling.

These are some suggestions to help you and your dog to enjoy walking with a loose leash

1. When he starts to pull, stop immediately and stand still “Be a tree” until the leash relaxes. This can happen when your dog takes a step back or turns around looking at you giving you focus. Once this happens, start walking again. Keep repeating this step as necessary. Yes, it will take longer to go for a walk, but in the long run it will pay off.
2. It takes much patience to “Be a tree” so you can also try another method, that once your dog starts to pull, tell him “Let’s Go” and turn away from him and walk in the other direction without jerking on the leash.
3. To help avoid yanking the leash, you need to sound motivating to your dog so use an exciting voice to get his attention. When he is following you and the leash isn’t tight, turn back to the original direction you were going. This may take several tries until your dog figures out that pulling will not be reinforced with forward movement, but walking calmly on a loose leash will allow your dog to get where he wants to go.
4. Once your dog is listening more, make it unpredictable of where your dog will be walking. I like to zigzag on the path so I am not always going straight. Occasionally he may bump into my leg, but he learns quickly to focus on me. You can walk making a figure 8 or a circle at times. Your neighbors may be wondering what is going on, but that’s OK. You are teaching your dog to walk well on leash.
5. Praising your dog is so important when he is doing the right thing by not pulling and keeping a loose leash. Keep it interesting for your dog while you walk by talking to him or occasionally giving them a yummy treat. You want to make yourself very interesting to your dog
6. Using equipment can also help with loose leash walking. It will not teach your dog to walk without pulling, but it will minimize the pulling. Such equipment is front clip harnesses, head halters and Martingale collars.

Training your dog to walk with a loose leash takes time and patience and consistency, but the reward is so worth it. It is best to start training your dog as soon as you attach the leash for the first time. Practice in low distraction areas where there are few people and dogs. As your training becomes more consistent, then you can try and introduce your dog to higher distracting environments.

Happy training!