

Let's Go for a Walk!

Getting your dog to behave on walks is easier than you think.

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"Let's go for a walk!" ranks as my dogs' second-favorite phrase, topped only by "Are you hungry?" We walk almost every day. A vigorous walk provides good exercise, both for the dogs and me. The fresh air, green grass and blue sky invigorate us. When we walk, I see neighbors I might not otherwise see, and we talk and share news, renewing neighborhood ties.

My dogs seem to enjoy the walks as much as I do. Creatures of habit, they like walking the same route each day, sniffing the same places, checking to see who has been by this way. But when we walk someplace new, their excitement shows. Recently we went for a walk along a sidewalk parallel to the beach. Dax's nose was going full-speed, sifting through all the different smells: rocks, seaweed and sand. All had to be investigated. Kes was more visually oriented and fascinated with the seagulls flying overhead and the pelicans diving into the waves offshore.

A lot of other people walk their dogs along the beach, too, and it was nice to see so many well-behaved dogs. Most of the dog owners acted responsibly, picking up after their dogs and keeping them on leash. Unfortunately, there were a few rotten apples. One young man released his dog off leash on the beach even though signs mark this as a "No dogs" beach. I understand he enjoys giving his dog some freedom, but change comes from working in and through the system, not from breaking the law. There were also a few dog owners who did not pick up after their dogs. When I saw one, I offered a plastic bag for that purpose.

If you haven't taken your dog for a walk recently, you're missing out on an activity that can be very special. If you haven't walked your pet because of behavior problems, such as aggression or excessive pulling, enroll in a dog training class or seek the advice of a professional trainer.