

Dog won't walk on a leash

Ease her back into the habit of walking on-leash with reward and praise.

September Morn

Q. I have a 4-month-old Cavalier King Charles Spaniel. When we first got her, and for the first three months we had her, we took her outside on leash. Then I got a fenced yard, and she was allowed to roam freely. I recently had to move back to an apartment, and now when I put the leash on her, all she does is sit. No matter how long I stay outside with her, she doesn't move. How can I get her to walk on leash again?

A. Your dog used to be good walking on leash, but now she's gotten out of the habit. Plus, being in a new environment might be a little worrisome to her. Here are a couple of things you could try to get her used to being on leash again.

Put her leash on her while you're both in the house, and leave it attached for half an hour. Don't try to get your dog to move at all, just act as if everything is completely normal. Go about your usual home activities, moving from room to room, dropping bits of your dog's favorite treats here and there as you walk around. Let her see you drop some of the treats, but don't try to cajole or entice her to go to them. Let her decide when she's ready to move. Don't focus on the leash or on your dog's behavior, and act normal.

If she doesn't move, go into a room where she can't see you from where she's sitting. Sit down, get comfortable, and read or watch television. Every so often, go to your dog and give her a friendly pat, then walk away and ignore her again. At the end of the half hour, calmly remove the leash. A couple of hours later put the leash back on again and repeat the dropping-treats-and-ignoring-the-dog process.

Another tactic is to clip the leash to her collar and tie a long piece of strong string to the leash handle. Carry her out into the yard and set her down a good distance away from the door. Stand by her a few minutes, then calmly turn your back and walk away from her, toward the house. Go to the end of the string and hold it. Keep your back to your dog and ignore her. If possible, sit down and read. Don't call or tug the string. Let her decide what to do. If a half hour passes and she still hasn't moved, calmly pick her up and take her back inside. Repeat this process a couple of hours later.

Once your dog decides to get up and go to you or move around, praise her in a low-key manner, pick her up and pet her for a few minutes, then gently set her back on the ground and walk away again. Praise and gently pet her when she follows or comes to you.

Your dog only missed out on leashed walks for one month, so once she realizes that she doesn't have much of a choice and there's no reason to be afraid, it shouldn't take her long to get back in the habit.