

THE SLACK LEASH METHOD

**Five games that turn a puller
into a dog who checks in**



Topics Included

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Why Your Dog Pulls (It Isn't Strength)

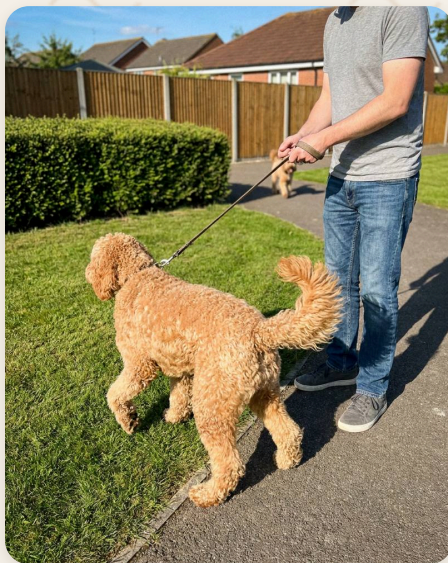


The arm that aches by the second lamppost

Two minutes into the walk, your shoulder is already tired. Your dog is out at the end of the leash, weight forward, and it hasn't let up since the front door. By the time you're home, you've been dragged past three lampposts, one trash can, and somebody's front hedge.

Why Your Dog Pulls (It Isn't Strength)

The usual explanation is that your dog is strong, or stubborn, or hasn't been shown who's in charge. All three are wrong, and believing them leads owners toward corrections and equipment that treat the wrong problem.



The actual mechanism

Here is the whole thing in one sentence: **pulling gets rewarded, every single time, by arriving somewhere interesting.**

Why Your Dog Pulls (It Isn't Strength)

Your dog wants to reach the lamppost. It pulls. It arrives at the lamppost. That sequence has run hundreds or thousands of times, and it has essentially never failed. From your dog's point of view, pulling is the single most reliably rewarded behavior in its entire day – more reliable than sit, more reliable than its own name, because you have, without meaning to, paid for it every single walk since puppyhood.

No harness, no head collar, no amount of firmness changes that arithmetic on its own. Equipment changes how much the pulling hurts you. Only changing what happens the instant the leash goes tight changes the dog's behavior.

Why Your Dog Pulls (It Isn't Strength)



Why some dogs pull for different reasons

Not every pulling dog is doing the same math, and it's worth knowing which kind you have before you start, because it changes where the training gets hard.

Why Your Dog Pulls (It Isn't Strength)

Excitement-driven pulling is a dog that wants to *reach* things – another dog, a person, an interesting smell up ahead – and pulls out of sheer forward enthusiasm rather than any real strategy. This dog often walks nicely for stretches and then surges the moment something interesting appears. Its recovery is usually fast: interrupt the pull, and it's back with you within a step or two.

Persistence-driven pulling is a different animal. This dog is running an ongoing experiment on your consistency. If you hold the line for ten minutes and then, because you're late, let it drag you the rest of the way, it hasn't learned that pulling doesn't work – it's learned that pulling works *eventually*, which is often enough to keep the behavior alive indefinitely. This dog specifically tests whichever walks are least consistent, and it's remarkably good at telling the difference between a walk where you mean it and a walk where you don't.

Most dogs sit somewhere between the two, but almost every dog leans one way, and it's usually obvious within the first week of practicing Chapter 3's games: the excitement-driven dog improves quickly and generalizes fast; the persistence-driven dog tests every inconsistency you allow and needs the two-walk split in Game 5 more than anything else in this book.

Why Your Dog Pulls (It Isn't Strength)

This split maps unusually well onto the actual genetics of a Goldendoodle. The Golden Retriever side was bred to charge forward into fields and water after game – the same forward-moving drive that shows up as excitement-driven pulling. The Poodle side contributes real intelligence and persistence, the same traits that let a dog notice, quickly and reliably, that pulling actually gets results – the raw material of persistence-driven pulling. A Goldendoodle that pulls hard on both counts isn't unusually difficult; it's carrying both halves of exactly the genetic combination you'd expect to produce this problem.

What actually breaks the cycle

If pulling is rewarded by forward motion, then the fix is mechanical, not emotional: **a tight leash never gets the dog where it wants to go, and a loose leash always does.** Every game in Chapter 3 is a different practical way of enforcing that one rule, consistently enough that your dog's own experience teaches the lesson faster than any correction could.

This is slow at first. For the first week or two of genuinely consistent practice, you may barely leave your own street. That's normal, and it's what Chapter 2 covers next – because the reason most owners give up on loose-leash training isn't that it doesn't work. It's that they try to run it on the one walk they can't afford to make slow.

Why Your Dog Pulls (It Isn't Strength)

What to take from this chapter

1. Pulling isn't about strength or dominance. It's a behavior that has been rewarded thousands of times by arriving somewhere interesting.
2. Equipment changes how much pulling hurts you. Only consistent consequences change whether your dog keeps doing it.
3. Excitement-driven pulling improves quickly with practice. Persistence-driven pulling specifically tests inconsistency, and needs the strictest routine.
4. The whole method comes down to one rule: tight never gets there, loose always does.

Chapter 2 covers why “just be firmer” and “let them wear themselves out” both fail against this particular mechanism, before Chapter 3 gets into the five games that actually work.

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Why



Four fixes everyone tries first

Why

Fix one: a firmer correction. A sharp leash pop or a stern word interrupts the pull for a moment, but it doesn't touch the actual arithmetic from Chapter 1 – the dog still arrives closer to whatever it wanted the instant the correction ends and the walk continues. Interrupting the pull without changing what happens next just adds an unpleasant beat in the middle of an otherwise still-rewarded sequence.

Fix two: stronger equipment. A tighter collar, a prong, or a slip lead all increase how much pulling costs the dog physically, and for some dogs that's enough to suppress the behavior on its own. This book does not recommend any of them, and neither do the veterinary behavior bodies: they work through discomfort, and the fallout can include a dog that becomes anxious about the equipment or that ties the pain to whatever it happened to be looking at, which builds reactivity where there was none. Chapter 6 goes through that properly. But set the welfare question aside for a moment, because there is a practical one too: suppression isn't the same as a dog that has learned loose is better – take the equipment off, or let the dog get excited enough to override the discomfort, and the original behavior is often still fully intact underneath.

Fix three: a longer walk to tire them out. This treats pulling as a symptom of excess energy, but Chapter 1 already showed it's a rewarded behavior, not a release valve. A tired dog that has still been rewarded for pulling on the way home from a long walk has simply had more practice at the exact thing you're trying to stop.

Why

Fix four: giving up and using a retractable leash. This one deserves a specific mention because it's common and quietly counterproductive. A retractable leash keeps the line under light tension almost constantly, which means your dog is getting a small, steady stream of exactly the sensation loose-leash training is trying to eliminate. It solves the walk for today and makes tomorrow's training slightly harder.



Why inconsistency is the real enemy

Why

Here's the pattern behind most stalled loose-leash training: it works on the training walk and falls apart on the walk to the vet, the walk to school pickup, the walk when you're already running late. On those walks, the destination matters more than the lesson, so the leash gets let out, the pace picks up, and the dog gets to the door in that day's usual way – by pulling.

For a persistence-driven dog especially, that single inconsistent walk isn't neutral. It's proof that the rule has exceptions, and a dog that discovers pulling sometimes still works will keep testing for the exception on every walk afterward, including the ones where you're trying hard to be consistent.

The two things that actually move the needle

First: separate training walks from transport walks entirely, with different equipment for each, so your dog can tell which kind of walk this is before you've even left the house. This isn't a lesser strategy while you wait for the real training to work – it's what makes the real training survivable, because it means the walk with a deadline never has to double as a lesson you can't afford to slow down for.

Why

Second: make the consequence for a tight leash completely automatic and completely consistent on every training walk, no exceptions – the walk simply doesn't continue while the leash is tight, every single time, regardless of how late you are or how tired you are of standing still. Chapter 3 builds this rule into five specific games rather than leaving it as a vague principle you have to remember to apply.

What to take from this chapter

1. Firmer corrections and stronger equipment suppress pulling without teaching the dog anything new about what actually works.
2. A longer walk beforehand just gives more practice at the behavior you're trying to eliminate.
3. One inconsistent walk can undo weeks of progress, especially with a persistence-driven dog testing for exceptions.
4. Splitting training walks from transport walks, with completely consistent consequences on the training walk, is what makes real progress possible.

Chapter 3 turns all of this into five specific, repeatable games.

Why

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The Five Games



How to use this chapter

The Five Games

Run all five games on dedicated training walks – short, unhurried, no destination – rather than on the walks you actually need to get somewhere. Chapter 4 covers how to set those two kinds of walk up so they don't get tangled together. Expect slow, almost embarrassingly small progress in the first week or two. That's the method working, not failing.



Game 1 – The Frozen Human

This is the mechanical core of the entire method: the leash tightening simply stops the walk, every time, with no exceptions.

The Five Games

What you need: a standard leash, a harness your dog can't slip out of, and a training walk with no deadline.

How to run it:

1. Walk normally. The instant the leash goes fully tight, stop completely – feet planted, arm relaxed at your side, not pulling back.
2. Say nothing and wait. Do not call your dog back or give any cue. Simply stand still until the leash slackens on its own, even slightly.
3. The moment it slackens, immediately continue walking, as the reward for the slack.
4. Repeat every single time the leash tightens, for the entire walk, however many times that takes.

Goal: your dog learns that forward motion is available on a loose leash and nowhere else, because it has just personally proven that a tight leash brings the whole walk to a stop.

Expect very little distance covered in the first sessions. A ten-minute walk that only covers 130 feet (40 m) is a complete success if every single tight-leash moment was met with a full stop.

The Five Games



Game 2 – The About-Turn

Standing still teaches “tight stops the walk.” Changing direction teaches something extra: that your dog needs to actually watch where you’re going, not just aim at what it wants.

What you need: the same setup as Game 1, in a space with enough room to change direction freely.

How to run it:

The Five Games

1. Walk normally. When the leash tightens, instead of just stopping, pause for two or three seconds and then turn and walk briskly the other way.
2. Do this without any cue or announcement – the unpredictability is the point. A dog that never knows which way you're about to go has a real reason to keep half an eye on you.
3. Reward generously the moment your dog catches up and falls in beside you with a loose leash.
4. Mix this with Game 1's stationary stop throughout a single walk, so your dog can't predict which response a tight leash will get.

Goal: your dog starts checking in and adjusting its position before the leash ever goes tight, because it has learned you might change direction at any moment.

The Five Games



Game 3 – The Pant Seam Delivery

Dogs orbit wherever the food shows up. This game builds a strong, specific preference for walking in the one spot that keeps the leash naturally loose.

What you need: a full treat pouch and a lot of small, low-value treats – this game runs on frequency, not size.

How to run it:

The Five Games

1. As you walk, deliver a treat directly to the seam of your pant leg, at the exact height and spot you want your dog's head to be, every few steps at first.
2. Say nothing beforehand – the treat appearing at that spot is the whole lesson. Don't lure your dog into position by holding food out in front, which teaches a dog to walk in front of you instead.
3. Gradually stretch the distance between deliveries as your dog starts offering the position on its own, without being fed constantly to hold it.
4. Use this especially in the first few minutes of a walk, when a fresh dog is at its most likely to pull hard toward the first interesting thing it sees.

Goal: your dog defaults toward the position where treats reliably appear, which happens to be exactly the position that keeps the leash loose.

The Five Games



Game 4 – Sniff Tax

Sniffing isn't a distraction from the walk – for your dog, it largely is the walk. This game turns that fact into one of your most powerful rewards instead of fighting it.

What you need: nothing extra, just a willingness to let your dog's nose lead for short, deliberate stretches.

How to run it:

The Five Games

1. Pick a reasonable stretch of loose-leash walking – 30 feet (10 m) is a fine starting point – and the moment your dog completes it without a single tight-leash moment, say a release word like “go sniff” and let it investigate whatever it wants for a short while.
2. Once the sniffing winds down naturally, ask for another stretch of loose-leash walking before the next release.
3. Increase the distance required between releases as your dog gets more reliable, but never remove sniffing entirely – it’s the payment, not an obstacle to it.

Goal: your dog learns that a loose leash is what earns the thing it wants most on a walk, which is permission to actually explore.

The Five Games



Game 5 – The Two-Leash Split

This game isn't a training exercise so much as the structure that makes the other four sustainable in real life, especially against a persistence-driven puller testing for exceptions.

The Five Games

What you need: two distinct setups – for example a standard harness and leash for training walks, and a front-clip harness for transport walks – kept visually and physically different from each other.

How to run it:

1. Decide in advance which walks are training walks – short, no destination, no deadline – and which are transport walks, where you genuinely need to get somewhere.
2. Use one setup exclusively for training walks and the other exclusively for transport walks, every time, without mixing them.
3. On training walks, run Games 1 through 4 with complete consistency, no exceptions, ever.
4. On transport walks, manage rather than train – accept that this walk isn't the lesson, get where you're going safely, and don't feel obligated to enforce the full stop-and-wait rule when you're already late.

Goal: your dog learns to read which kind of walk this is from the equipment alone, which protects your hard-won consistency on training walks from ever being undermined by a rushed transport walk.

What to take from this chapter

The Five Games

1. Games 1 and 2 build the core rule: tight stops the walk, and direction can change at any moment.
2. Game 3 builds a default walking position through repetition, not luring.
3. Game 4 turns sniffing into the reward that reinforces everything else.
4. Game 5 protects all of it by keeping training walks and transport walks completely separate, with different equipment as the signal.

Chapter 4 covers the equipment and route choices that make these five games easier to run without having to think through the details every time.

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Set Up the Two Walks



Two hooks by the door, not one

Game 5 only works if the two setups are genuinely easy to tell apart – for you, grabbing gear on your way out, and for your dog, reading which walk is starting before the door even opens.

Set Up the Two Walks

Keep both hanging in the same two spots by the door, every time. The training setup – the harness and leash you use exclusively for Games 1 through 4 – goes on one hook. The transport setup goes on the other. Never let the two overlap, and never use the training gear for a walk where you genuinely need to get somewhere on time; one exception is enough to blur the distinction you're relying on.



Choosing the training-walk route

Set Up the Two Walks

The best training route is boring on purpose: short, familiar, low in exciting distractions, often no further than up and down your own street. This isn't a compromise – a quiet, unremarkable route means more repetitions of Games 1 and 2 per minute, because there's less waiting around for the leash to naturally tighten. An exciting route with other dogs and interesting smells sounds more fun, but it produces far fewer teachable moments per walk in the early weeks.

Why front-clip, specifically

A front-clip design isn't an arbitrary pick among interchangeable harness styles. A peer-reviewed study that fitted dogs with a calibrated leash-tension meter found they pulled significantly harder, and for longer, in a standard back-clip harness than in a plain collar – a back-clip sits at the strongest part of a dog's body and lets it lean its full weight into the pull comfortably, the same mechanical principle a sled-dog harness relies on. A collar avoids that problem but concentrates all the force on the neck instead, which carries its own real risks (Chapter 6 covers those). A front-clip harness is the practical middle ground: it doesn't invite the pull-into-pressure the way a back-clip does, and it doesn't concentrate force on a sensitive part of the body the way a collar does.

Set Up the Two Walks

One design detail is worth checking for specifically: look for a **Y-shaped** front strap rather than a single straight strap running across the chest. A straight strap that sits too low can restrict how far your dog's front legs reach forward with each stride; a Y-shape does the same job at the chest without getting in the way of the shoulders.

Fitting the transport-walk harness properly

Whatever you use for transport walks, check the fit properly rather than assuming it's right out of the box. A front-clip harness should sit with its chest strap well clear of the shoulder joints, and the girth strap should allow two fingers to slide underneath it comfortably – snug enough not to shift around, loose enough not to restrict movement. A poorly fitted harness undermines even a well-managed transport walk, because a dog fighting an uncomfortable fit pulls for reasons that have nothing to do with anything in this book.

Putting both to work together

Once the two hooks, the boring route, and a properly fitted harness are all in place, most of what Chapter 3 asks of you stops requiring a decision at all – you grab the right gear, you're already on the right route, and the training runs on autopilot even on the days you're tired or distracted, which is when consistency matters most.

Set Up the Two Walks

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The One-Page Checklist



Print this page

Keep this by the door with your leash and harness. Most stalled progress comes from one skipped step on a rushed morning, not from the method failing.

The One-Page Checklist

Before every training walk

- ☐ You have genuinely spare time – no destination, no deadline.
- ☐ The training harness and leash are the ones on the hook, not the transport set.
- ☐ Treat pouch is stocked with small, low-value treats for the Pant Seam Delivery.

During every training walk

- ☐ Every tight leash gets a full stop or an about-turn – no exceptions, even when it's the fifth time in two minutes.
- ☐ Treats are delivered at the pant seam, never held out in front to lure.
- ☐ Sniffing is offered as a release, not fought as a distraction.

The One-Page Checklist



Before every transport walk

- ☐ The transport harness fits properly – two fingers under the girth strap, chest strap clear of the shoulders.
- ☐ You're not attempting to enforce full training-walk rules on a walk with a deadline.

The One-Page Checklist

Once a week

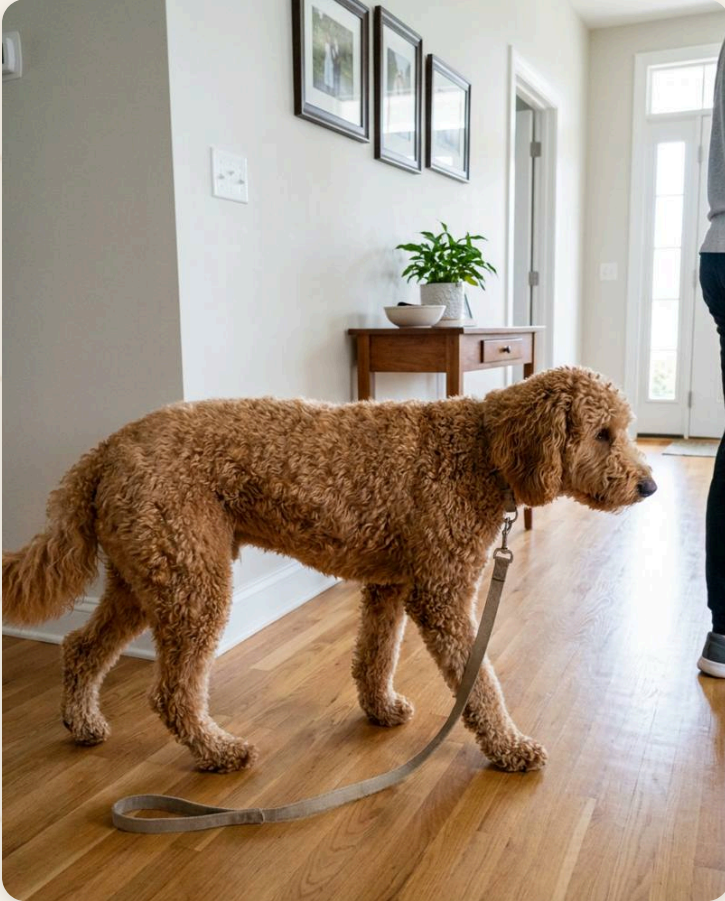
- ❑ Check in with everyone in the house: has anyone used the training gear for a rushed, transport-style walk? One mix-up undoes the distinction for a while.
- ❑ If a training walk still covers almost no ground after two to three weeks of consistent practice, re-read Chapter 7 before pushing harder.

One flag that means stop and get help

- ❑ Lunging, growling, or aggressive reactions toward people or other dogs on leash. This is a different problem from ordinary pulling and needs an in-person assessment from a certified trainer before continuing with this book's games.

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Thirteen Questions Doodle Owners Actually Ask



"My dog walks perfectly at home but pulls the second we're outside – why?"

Thirteen Questions Doodle Owners Actually Ask

Because home has none of the things worth pulling toward. A skill learned in a low-distraction environment doesn't automatically transfer to a high-distraction one – it has to be practiced there directly. Start Games 1 and 2 in your quietest outdoor space, like your own front yard or driveway, before expecting the same result on a busy street.



“Will a stronger harness or head collar fix this on its own?”

Thirteen Questions Doodle Owners Actually Ask

It will reduce how hard the pulling is on your arm and shoulder, which matters for your own comfort and safety. It won't teach your dog anything about what earns forward motion, which is the actual behavior change this book is after. Equipment and training work best together, not as substitutes for each other.



“What about a head halter, like a Gentle Leader?”

Thirteen Questions Doodle Owners Actually Ask

A head halter works on a different principle than a harness – the leash attaches under the chin, so a gentle turn of your dog's head brings the whole body around with it, the same idea as a horse halter. Used correctly, it's a genuinely useful management tool, especially if you're managing a large, strong Goldendoodle and you're smaller, older, or otherwise not looking to out-muscle a dog that outweighs your arm strength. It doesn't work through pain – steady, gentle guidance is the whole mechanism.

The real risk isn't the tool itself, it's misuse: if a head halter is used like a leash-pop, jerking the dog's head sideways during a hard lunge, it can genuinely injure the neck. Introduce it gradually, let your dog get comfortable wearing it with treats and no leash pressure before ever attaching a leash to it, and never use it for a sharp correction. Some dogs paw at their face or resist it at first even with a slow, correct introduction, and a few never fully accept one – if yours is one of them, a well-fitted front-clip harness is a perfectly good fallback.

Thirteen Questions Doodle Owners Actually Ask



"How long before The Frozen Human actually gets me anywhere?"

Most dogs show a real, noticeable change within one to two weeks of genuinely consistent daily training walks – meaning every tight leash gets a full stop, with no exceptions, on every training walk. Dogs with a long history of successful pulling, or households that only manage a few sessions a week, take longer. The rule stays the same regardless of pace: never relax the consistency to speed things up.

"My dog only pulls toward other dogs, never anywhere else – is that different?"

Thirteen Questions Doodle Owners Actually Ask

If it's simple enthusiasm – pulling to get closer, tail loose, body relaxed – treat it the same way as any other excitement-driven pulling, with extra Pant Seam Delivery practice specifically when other dogs are visible at a distance. If the pulling comes with stiff body language, barking, or lunging rather than loose excitement, that's a different problem – reactivity rather than simple pulling – and it needs Chapter 7's safety note, not just more repetitions of these games.

"Is it okay to let my dog pull on the way to the park if I train on the way back?"

No, and this is one of the most common ways progress quietly stalls. A dog that gets to pull on the way there has just had a full, successful rehearsal of the exact behavior you're eliminating. Use the Two-Leash Split instead: transport gear and no training expectations in both directions, on a walk that isn't a dedicated training session.

"My dog is food-motivated at home but ignores treats outside – why doesn't Game 3 work?"

Thirteen Questions Doodle Owners Actually Ask

This usually means the environment is currently more interesting than the treats on offer, which is common early on. Use higher-value food outdoors than you'd bother with at home, and start Pant Seam Delivery somewhere quieter before working up to your dog's usual walking routes.

"Can I use a retractable leash once training is done?"

Once your dog reliably keeps a leash loose on a standard leash across different environments, a retractable leash is less likely to undo that progress than it would have been during training. Many owners still avoid them permanently simply because the light constant tension they produce is the opposite of what a genuinely loose leash feels like.

One combination to avoid regardless of how well-trained your dog is: pairing a retractable leash with a front-clip harness or head halter. Those tools work by making pulling mechanically unproductive; a retractable leash does the opposite, feeding out more line exactly when the leash goes tight, which cancels out whatever the no-pull equipment is trying to teach.

"My dog stops dead and refuses to move at all instead of pulling – is that the opposite problem?"

Thirteen Questions Doodle Owners Actually Ask

It's a different problem with a different cause, usually fear, discomfort with the equipment, or overwhelm rather than motivation to reach something. Check the harness fit first, and if a properly fitted harness and a calm, unpressured approach don't resolve it within a session or two, this is worth a conversation with a certified trainer rather than pushing through with leash games built for pulling.

"Multiple people walk my dog – does it matter if only I do the training?"

Yes, considerably. A dog that experiences completely consistent rules with you and inconsistent handling from someone else in the household will keep testing for the exception, especially if it leans persistence-driven. Get everyone who walks the dog using the same two-leash split and the same full-stop rule, even if only one person is running the more detailed games.

"Is a prong or e-collar ever appropriate?"

We don't recommend either as a starting point for ordinary pulling. Both suppress the behavior through discomfort rather than teaching a dog what actually earns forward motion, and both carry real risk of fallout – including a dog that becomes anxious about the equipment itself, or that associates the discomfort with whatever it happened to be looking at, which can create reactivity where none existed before.

Thirteen Questions Doodle Owners Actually Ask

It's also worth knowing this isn't only about the tools. The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior's position statement names leash corrections themselves – not just prong collars, choke chains, or e-collars – as an aversive method it says should not be used under any circumstances, on any dog. A university study that tested several collar types on a simulated dog-neck model, including a plain flat buckle collar, backs that up with hard numbers: even a single sharp "correction" tug produced pressures known from human research to risk tissue and blood-vessel damage. The problem isn't limited to obviously harsh-looking equipment – an ordinary flat collar used with a hard correction carries some of the same risk.

"My dog pulls hardest in the first five minutes then settles – is that normal?"

Very common, and it usually reflects genuine excitement at the start of a walk rather than anything more serious. Put extra effort into Games 1 through 3 specifically in those first few minutes, since that's when most of the reinforcement for pulling has historically happened.

"How do I know if it's pulling from excitement or something more serious like reactivity?"

Thirteen Questions Doodle Owners Actually Ask

Watch the body language, not just the pulling itself. Excitement-driven pulling comes with a loose, wiggly body, soft ears, and a dog that's easy to redirect once you have its attention. Reactivity looks tense – a stiff body, hard staring, raised hackles, or barking and lunging rather than simply straining forward. If you're seeing the second pattern, treat it as its own issue and get an in-person assessment before relying on this book's games alone.

If you've confirmed it's reactivity rather than plain excitement, there's a useful next question to bring to that assessment: does your dog play happily with the same kind of dog, or greet the same kind of stranger, when it's off leash? If the answer is genuinely yes – loose-bodied, relaxed play with no leash involved – the reactivity is likely frustration-based: a friendly, social dog that wants to greet and is being physically blocked by the leash from doing the one thing it wants, which can look like an outburst but isn't fear or aggression underneath. If the same tension shows up even off leash, that points toward fear instead, and the two patterns call for different handling from a trainer. Either way this is still a job for an in-person professional rather than something to self-diagnose and train around alone – but knowing which pattern you're looking at helps you describe the problem accurately when you call one.

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When It Didn't Work



Start with an audit, not stricter equipment

If two or three weeks of consistent daily practice haven't produced a noticeable change, resist the urge to reach for stronger equipment or harsher corrections. Check these first.

When It Didn't Work

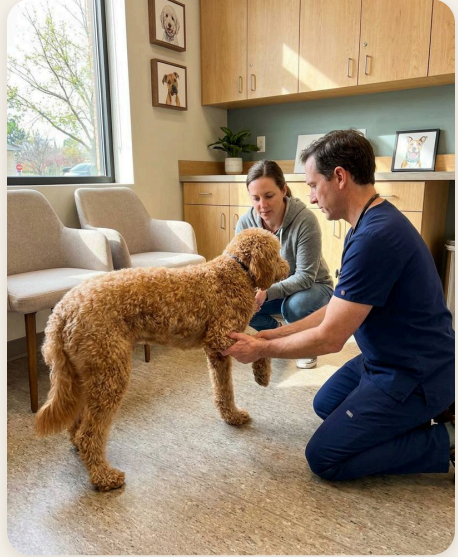
Check for a hidden inconsistent walk. Ask everyone in the household directly: has anyone let the dog pull on a rushed walk, or used the training gear when they were actually in a hurry? One inconsistent walk is often enough to convince a persistence-driven dog that pulling still pays off often enough to be worth trying.

Check the training route. A route with too much going on produces far fewer teachable stop-and-slack repetitions per session than a boring one. If progress has stalled, move training back to the quietest, least exciting space you have access to for a week, then work back up gradually.

Check the value of your rewards. If the environment has gotten more distracting than your treats are worth, Pant Seam Delivery loses its pulling power. Raise the value of what you're using outdoors, particularly in the first few minutes of a walk.

Check the dose. A few sessions squeezed into one weekend isn't enough repetition to compete with a behavior that's been reinforced for months or years. Give the games genuine daily practice for two to three weeks before judging the result.

When It Didn't Work



The flag that changes everything: reactivity, not pulling

If your dog's leash behavior includes lunging, hard barking, growling, or a stiff, tense body directed at people or other dogs – rather than loose, excited straining toward something it wants – stop treating this as an ordinary pulling problem.

When It Didn't Work

Reactivity has a different underlying cause, usually fear, frustration, or overarousal rather than simple excitement, and the games in this book aren't built to address it safely on their own. Attempting to power through a reactive episode with the Frozen Human or an About-Turn can escalate the situation in the moment. Get an in-person assessment from a certified trainer, ideally one experienced with reactive dogs specifically, before continuing to walk your dog in situations that trigger it.

When It Didn't Work



When it's sudden, not long-standing

When It Didn't Work

A dog that has always pulled is a different situation from a previously easy-walking dog that suddenly starts pulling hard or behaving oddly on leash. A sudden change, especially alongside limping, reluctance to walk at all, or other new symptoms, deserves a veterinary check before more training – pain is a common and easily missed cause of sudden leash behavior changes, and no amount of consistent stopping fixes a cause that isn't behavioral.

The other kind of “sudden”: adolescence, not injury

Not every sudden regression is a vet visit or a training failure. A dog that has been walking beautifully for weeks and then, somewhere around four and a half to seven months old, starts pulling hard again – with no limping, no reluctance to walk, and no other new symptom – is very likely going through a well-documented adolescent phase, not losing the skill you taught it.

When It Didn't Work

A study from a university animal-welfare research center that tracked owner-reported problem behaviors found that roughly a third of owners (31% at six months old, 35% at nine months) reported some behavior they considered a problem, and pulling on the leash was among the top three most commonly reported issues at both ages. That makes this exact regression one of the most statistically normal complaints at exactly this age – not a sign your dog is unusually difficult or that the method has stopped working. Breeders and trainers who work with this age group describe it as the dog's evaluative system recalibrating: a real neurological and hormonal shift, not lost learning.

The response is the same as any other stall: keep the two-leash split airtight, lower your criteria back to shorter, easier stretches for a week or two, and let the consistency do its work again. It resolves faster than owners expect once you stop treating it as a setback.

If none of that applies and it's simply slow

Dogs with years of successful pulling behind them typically take longer to change than a habit that's only a few months old, and that's expected rather than a sign of failure. Keep the two-leash split airtight, keep training walks genuinely boring and low-pressure, and keep every single tight-leash moment met with a full stop. The dogs that seem most stuck usually just have the longest history to unlearn.

When It Didn't Work

What to take from this chapter

1. Before escalating, check for a hidden inconsistent walk, too exciting a route, low-value rewards, or simply not enough practice yet.
2. Lunging, growling, or stiff, tense body language toward people or dogs is reactivity, not ordinary pulling, and needs a certified trainer's in-person help.
3. A sudden change in a previously easy-walking dog belongs at the vet first.
4. A regression around four and a half to seven months old, with no other new symptoms, is usually adolescence recalibrating, not a lost skill or a failed method.
5. A longer history of pulling means a longer timeline to change it – not a method that's failed.

This guide is educational and is not a substitute for veterinary or professional behavioral advice. A dog that lunges, growls, or reacts aggressively toward people or other dogs on leash needs an in-person assessment from a certified trainer before this book's games are attempted alone.