

MILTON ANIMAL LEAGUE

DOG WALKING MANUAL



Introduction to Dog Walking at the Milton Animal League

Dog walkers have a wonderful opportunity to make a difference in the lives of the dogs who spend time here at MAL before they are adopted. The main goal of our dog walkers is to make sure our dogs get exercise, socialization, and learn some basic manners. Walking dogs provides them with both physical and mental exercise. It provides socialization with a variety of different handlers and often our walkers will be a part of the positive training we give to all of our dogs.

Taking a shelter dog out for walks and socialization time can be challenging at times. Many of our dogs lack basic social skills, and some have had little or no experience walking on a leash. Many are unaccustomed to, or are cautious around, other dogs, children, or people with whom they are not familiar. Even short amounts of time spent in this socialization process with our shelter dogs can have a tremendous influence on their adoptability. The time you spend with our shelter dogs can have a wonderful impact on them – and on you.

It is important to read and understand the following rules to ensure that your time spent with the dogs will be enjoyable and beneficial for both you and the animals here at MAL.

Before you walk dogs

Walking in the winter snow, the mud or the rain can be fun with the dogs – but it can also be messy. In any season, please wear appropriate casual clothing, which you do not intend to keep clean!

Dog walkers should not wear necklaces, bracelets, dangly earrings or loose scarves. Dogs can get caught in them or grab them.

Volunteers who work directly with animals in any capacity must wear closed-toed shoes. Rubber-soled shoes are strongly advised to prevent slipping in the kennel areas. Since you can get muddy you might want to have a second pair of shoes to change into later.

Since the dogs can sometimes jump up, long pants and long sleeved shirts are recommended to prevent scratches.

Safety Check

Always err on the side of caution when working with shelter animals.

Report any bites or injuries immediately. Stay current on appropriate vaccinations, such as tetanus.

Wash hands thoroughly with antibacterial soap or sanitize with gel before walking dogs, after walking dogs and between handling dogs from separate kennels.

Avoid hanging leashes or leads around your neck

Report back on anything out of the ordinary with the dogs: diarrhea, vomiting, hair loss, discharge of any kind, coughing, limping, bleeding, fleas, ticks, lethargy, etc.

Dog Walking Rules

No volunteer may take a dog out of or return it to the kennel. A trained staff member will do this for you.

All dogs must wear their appropriate collar or no-pull harness to be walked. A staff member will put these on the dog for you.

Avoid all other dogs – even those on leash - when walking a shelter dog. Return to the shelter if an encounter seems unavoidable.

Dog walkers must take ‘poop bags’ and clean up after the dog, while on a walk or when in the outdoor pens and fields.

Do not allow the dogs to walk on lawns or other private property.

Dogs must wear a leash at all times when out of their kennel.

If for some reason you need to bring a dog into the office area, knock on the door and announce you have a dog, and wait for someone to say it’s okay before you open the door. After getting the “ok” to enter, the dog should be behind you as you enter the office.

Procedures

Who Can Walk Dogs and What Dogs Can I Walk?

Read the dog walking list on the door leading into the kennels. Each dog is rated as easy, medium, difficult or staff only. All walkers begin with the easy dogs and progress with walking experience. Please know your limits and don't try to exceed those limits. If a dog proves to be more than you can handle, please come back to the shelter. Never work with a dog that makes you feel uncomfortable or that you do not feel comfortable controlling.

We have established the following age guidelines for safety and liability purposes:

Those under the age of 16 are not able to volunteer as a dog walker.

Teens 16-18 cannot walk dogs autonomously. They must walk with an adult staff member or experienced dog handler until they are deemed experienced enough to walk the "easy" rated dogs by themselves.

Adults 18 and over with under 20 hours of dog handler experience can walk dogs autonomously, however they may only walk those dogs listed as "easy" on the walk sheet.

Adults 18 and over with 20 or more hours of dog handling experience can walk dogs listed as "easy" or "medium" autonomously; however we ask that you be aware of your own physical limitations in dealing with specific animals. The shelter trainers will determine if a walker is capable of walking a "difficult" dog.

Stray dogs being held at the kennel by the town are deemed "staff only" since they have not yet been evaluated, and thus they are not to be handled by volunteers.

The dog walking list on the door leading to the kennel area also serves as a message board for the volunteers. Please check this each time you arrive to walk dogs since it is often updated with important information on a specific dog. Try to walk dogs who have not yet been walked yet that day. Once you do walk a dog, please check off that dog to let others know that that dog has been walked. The office area contains the dog walking tools: leashes, harnesses, treats and the important 'poop bags'.

Body Language

The first time you walk a dog, remember that part of your job as a walker is to read the dog you are with – and in turn the dog will be reading you. Humans relay information to dogs with our bodies, so watch your body language:

- * When you meet any dog, don't make eye contact or stare at any dog
- * Let the dog approach you – let the dog sniff your hand
- * If the dog does not immediately approach you, have patience
- * Keep your side to the dog – in other words do not lean over a dog, or face a dog with your chest and shoulders
- * Bend down at the knees when greeting a dog; do not bend over at the hips and do not put your face close to the dog when bending down
- * Pet the dog gently on the side of his body or back. Never reach down from above to pet a dog on his head – what the dog sees is a big hand coming toward him which can be scary or deemed an aggressive act
- * Speak to the dog in a normal, soothing, reassuring voice
- * Never hug, grab or kiss the dogs
- * Never raise your voice or shout at the dog
- * Move confidently but calmly - avoid jerky movements around the dogs
- * Always give full attention to the animal you are working with

Throughout your time with the dog, look at what the animal is communicating. They are always telling us something, we just have to learn their language. Dogs can see, hear, smell and otherwise sense subtle changes in our bodies. Your attitude will have an effect on the dogs.

If you are nervous, they will sense that. If you are not confident, the dog may react to that.

Here is a video on a “bad” meeting style versus a “good” meeting style:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02MErQ4I6MY>

Where Can I Walk the Dogs?

Adult dogs may be walked on Governor Stoughton Lane.

Please be courteous to our neighbors; do not let shelter dogs enter or soil any yard or driveway. If a dog defecates while on a walk immediately pick it up using the plastic bags which are in the office and which you should take with you on each walk.

We have three fields here at MAL. Until you have been told otherwise, keep the leash on the dog, with the dog dragging the leash behind him, so that you will have an easier time controlling the dog if necessary.

Only one dog is permitted in a field at a time. Be sure to check if the yard is in use before walking through with a dog.

The large yard to the right side of the building has one gate. Make sure the gate is securely closed and do not drop the leash until it is.

There are two smaller yards to the left side of the building. The one on the far left has one gate; the smaller of the two has a double door entry. Again, keep the leash on the dog, with the dog dragging the leash behind him, so that you will have an easier time controlling the dog if necessary. Also, make sure the gate is securely closed before you drop the leash.

Dogs should never be left unattended in any of these fields.

Can Dog Walkers Help With Training? YES

Sometimes a walk is just a walk and not a time to train. Sometimes they just need to run off some energy and they are not mentally in the right mode to learn a new behavior. But if the dog is ready to learn, we are ready to teach. Dogs with even a basic grasp of proper manners and leash etiquette will find new homes more quickly.

Before any walker or volunteer attempts to help train any of the MAL dogs, they first must have a training consultation with the shelter trainers. Not every dog is at the same place in the training scale and therefore the dogs will likely all be at different levels or certain dogs may be working on specific tasks or behaviors. In addition, what one person may think of as positive training methods, might not be what the shelter staff believes is the best training methods to be used with the animals, so all of this must be discussed in detail so that all people working on training are 100% consistent in their methods.

MAL uses positive reinforcement training techniques to gently guide our dogs to perform desired behaviors. This training style improves an animal's confidence in people, motivates and challenges the dog, helps the animal without fear and is a wonderful way for an animal to learn a new behavior. Positive reinforcement is very simple to use and learn by both the humans and the dogs. The crucial steps are:

Consistency, consistency, consistency. We can't say this enough. All people that work with the dog must follow the same training style and language used.

Positive reinforcement, i.e., Praise and Treats. Each time dogs perform a desired behavior, we say "good dog" and give them a treat. If the dog fails to do desired behavior, do not reward it.

Practice: "Practice does not make perfect, practice makes permanent." The more the dog succeeds at the desired behavior, the more permanent this behavior will become.

Timing: Proper timing is one of the most important aspects of positive reinforcement, but unfortunately this is where the humans are often poor learners. A dog must be rewarded with praise (“good dog”/treat) within three seconds - if the dog is rewarded after three seconds, you are actually rewarding something else.

Patience and calmness: Dogs will pick up on any changes in your body language, tone or attitude of the people working with them which not only can confuse the dog but it can make the training more difficult. If you become frustrated then immediately stop training and pick it up again another day with a fresh outlook.

Calmness in the Kennels

Kennel stress: Many shelter dogs suffer some level of stress when entering a kennel environment; it is an unnatural, usually unfamiliar, highly competitive, unsocial environment for the dog to be housed.

Our goal is to reduce the level of kennel stress in our dogs. One step we have implemented is to limit the amount of visitors in the kennel areas. Only approved staff and dog walkers with approval should enter the kennel area.

When one enters the kennel area, make sure you bring a handful of kibble treats with you. Stop briefly at each kennel and wait for the dog to stop jumping or barking. Give the dog a few seconds to control himself (four paws on the floor and no barking). If the dog responds – even for a split second—give the dog a treat and move on. If a barking dog stops when he sees you coming, give treat immediately. If the dog does not get control of himself, don’t look at the dog, turn your back and wait. Keep an eye on him and when he is at his quietest (quietest for him) reward the quiet.

Here is a video of this technique:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipZHTtStS_Y

Dogs will quickly learn that jumping and barking at a cage door is does not get them a treat but that being quiet and sitting gets them fun stuff like walks and treats. As simple as this seems, it really increases shelter adoption rates.

What Else Can I Help The Dog Learn?

Loose Leash walking is a wonderful behavior for our dogs to learn. A dog that walks politely on leash without pulling has an easier time getting adopted. To help a dog learn this behavior, it is important for the walker not to become frustrated with the dog. Patience is key.

There are two variations of this training. For younger dogs, when the dog runs in front of the walker with a tight leash, immediately turn 180 degrees and start walking in the opposite direction. Yes, you will be turning around and around at times! But the dog learns to walk behind the walker and that progression occurs when he is not pulling on the lead.

The second variation is very often used with older dogs: if the dog pulls, stop walking. If he does not stop pulling call him back to you, then when the leash is loose, begin walking again. If he pulls, stop walking and repeat. If he goes several steps without pulling, reward the dog with a “good walk” praise. It might take awhile to go to short distance, but that is ok. Lots of repetition and positive responses.

Here is a brief example of both of these techniques:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fu06fTwjFjA>

“Sit” command: Lets the dog learn that it should have his butt on the ground. For consistency, we will all use the following procedures to train a dog to follow the “sit” command:

1. Take a small bit of treat and hold it slightly above and in front of the dog’s head. If your hand is too far above the dog, the dog will jump up trying to get the treat. So keep your hand low enough so that you are holding the treat just above the dogs muzzle and skull.
2. Begin moving your hand towards the rear of the dog and say “sit.” The dog will follow the treat until he is forced to place his butt on the ground to continue to see the treat.

3. Immediately give the treat to the dog when the butt hits the ground, and praise him saying, “good sit.”
4. If the dog crouches back instead of sitting, treat it and, next time, require him to go further or fully sit.
5. If the dog jumps up, don’t give a treat and return to step 1.

Here is a video of the sit command:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CFSVhZO-UrY>

Do not push on a dog’s hind end to get him to sit. This is NOT positive reinforcement and it can hurt the dog. The dog learns by doing the behavior himself not by being manipulated into a position.

Work on training away from distractions such as other dogs, people or cars.

“Drop It” command: Lets the dog learn to release a possession.

Since “Drop It” involves a trade, we first use another toy as a trade. If the dog has a toy in his mouth, say “Drop It” and show another toy for the dog to have. Once he drops the initial toy, say “Good Drop It” to reinforce the term with the action.

The next step, once the walker has permission from the shelter trainers to do so, they can advance to having the dog drop a toy by using food, so it has to be a treat that is really really worth it. Most shelter dogs are pretty food motivated, so once you have been given permission to work with a dog on “Drop It”, grab some treats from the office area.

1. Get the dog to play with a toy. When the dog has the toy in his mouth, Show the dog a treat, keep the treat close enough to his muzzle so he does not jump up or forward. He will open his mouth to take the treat;
2. Again, timing is important because the instant the dog opens his mouth, the toy will be released and you say "Drop It" simultaneously. The dog then gets the treat AND he gets the toy back. Don’t keep the toy; the dog should not “lose” for giving up the toy. Teaching a dog that giving up his possessions is a good thing. It discourages resource guarding, a common behavioral reason for euthanasia.

3. Repeat, repeat, repeat. With repetition, the dog will learn to associate "Drop it" with mouth opening.

Here is a video of both of these steps:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBvhOKgWU_4

“Off” command: Lets the dog know that all four paws should be on the floor and is most often used when a dog has jumped up with its front paws onto a person.

For consistency with our training we will all use the following procedures to train a dog to follow the “off” command:

1. When a dog jumps up on you with its paws, pull your hands close to your body and turn away while saying “off.”
2. As soon as the dog has all four paws on the ground, turn and praise him with a verbal praise of “good dog” and a treat.
3. If the dog jumps up again, repeat steps 1 and 2.

Remember that repetition is very important. But make sure that you are repeating the correct steps. Often handlers accidentally reward a jumping dog that jumps up by touching it, talking to it and looking at it. Watch what most people do at the dog park. A dog jumps up and the owner pushes the dog away, yells at it to stop and glares at the dog. In the dog’s mind, he has received three rewards.

Please do not unintentionally reward a dog showing this kind of unwanted behavior.

Here is a video of the “Off” command training:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qGqZdzHzR8>

Parallel Walking

Parallel Walking: Having two dogs walking in parallel is advanced and can only be practiced with the permission of the shelter trainers. It is often done to assess a shelter dog's reaction to another dog or to desensitize a dog who is nervous around other dogs. It is also the best way for any dog to be introduced to a new dog.

Two walkers and two dogs are needed. The people holding the leashes position themselves between the dogs. The people and dogs will both be walking in the same direction – with each leashed dog walking parallel or side by side to each other; **HOWEVER** there should be enough space between them that on an extended leash, they could not reach one another. In the beginning, the more space between the dogs the better.

Don't let one dog be in front, they should be side by side. Don't be in a rush to get the dogs too close together. The walkers should walk slowly, steady and confidently. Watch the dogs' body language when they look at each other. Ideally we would like to see soft, relaxed faces bright with interest, but not tense or "hard". If there are stares, growls or if the dogs stiffen when they look at each other, increase the distance between them. Repeat these walks many times, gradually decreasing the distance between the dogs if possible. Sometimes it may take weeks or longer before a dog is ready to be walked parallel to another dog.

When turning around, make sure the dogs stay on the outside. Often on the turnarounds is when the dog's get too close to each other. Also even if the dogs seem fine or are seemingly ignoring one another, keep your attention on the dogs at all times.

Parallel walking enables dogs to learn about each other at a safe and controlled distance: they can read each other's body language, become familiar with each other's smells while nervousness and excitement have time to dissipate. It is your job to keep the dogs at a safe distance to one another and watch for signals of stress from the dogs in order to assess how the walk is progressing.

Here is a video of the parallel walking technique. Please keep in mind that in this video, for the purpose of showing the different placement of dogs and walkers, we did not stay on the same positioning for the time normally expected. This was done with dogs with which we were well acquainted, with experienced handlers and was done for the purpose of demonstration:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKwTfobsuxs>

Calming Signals

Calming signals are used by dogs to communicate with each other and humans through the use of body language. The signals are triggered as soon as there is anything which triggers stress and nervousness and they are used to let the other dog know they are not a threat and to calm themselves down. Often these calming signals come in quick succession so the dog walkers will really have to be observant to see them. With experience you will learn to see them. Here are some examples of the most common calming signals to look for and please report back to the shelter trainers after the walk on what you have seen:

Look Away - Turning of the head – This can be either a fast turn of the head to the side or back or held to the side or back and it is a sign that the dog is uncomfortable and he is trying to indicate avoidance to any stress or threat.



Here is a video of some look aways/head turns:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1oMkZEW6-Y>

Turning away – This is similar to a human turning away when the dog jumps up on you, you are telling them that you are not comfortable with that behavior. So watch to see that if during parallel walking a dog turns his side or back to the other dog it. You will see this behavior a lot during dog introductions and also at dog parks when the dogs might be nervous in a new situation or when play begins too get too rough or wild - the dogs will turn away in order to calm themselves or the game down.



Here is a video of a complete body turn away:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqxQS3-SzQs>

Licking – If you notice a dog quickly moving his tongue and licking, especially when approaching another dog, this is a signal from one dog to another that he is not a threat.



Watch closely on the video (and in real life too) as the licking can be difficult to observe sometimes:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWxhVf25JfA>

Shaking off – This is probably the most common calming signal used by dogs. This will look like the dog is shaking water off of his back, but there is no water!



In essence, the dog is ‘shaking off’ the nervous energy around him:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RO3uL7mxRI4>

Scratching – If all of a sudden the dog, in a stressful situation, starts scratching himself, that is a calming signal similar to shaking off – he is attempting to scratch the nervousness away:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HthUZNK6gO4>



Yawning – Yawning is often a signal used by the dog in situations where he is uncertain – in the veterinarian’s office, when approached by a stranger, travelling in a car – and when parallel walking with other dogs. Be on the lookout.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cStQp4qSbOE>

Calming signals are not only used from one dog to another, but the dog may also be using these signals towards you! So watch how the dog is responding to you – and respond in kind (if possible), such as turning when they turn, yawning after they yawn, etc. Communication comes in all forms.

Taking the Dog out of the Kennel

If with experience, you are given the responsibility of taking a dog out of the kennel, please follow the following steps:

Even nice dogs can get overly excited or competitive when a walk is involved. It is too stressful and sets off the dogs not being walked. To cut down on this heightened state, don’t take the dogs through the office. Instead, lower the guillotine doors to “lock in” the dogs on the side of the kennel in which you are going to walk a dog, leaving “out” the dog furthest away from the gate. Take a leash and walk to the outside kennel area. Make sure to close the fence door behind you so the outside kennel area is secure.

Unlock the latch. Block the kennel door with your body and step into the kennel, latching it behind you. With control, leash the dog. Never drag a dog by the leash. If the dog refuses to leave the kennel, you should spend extra time with him in the kennel area to make him feel more comfortable leaving with you. In order to allow the dog to hear your voice and be rewarded for being near you, say his name, and give him a treat, repeat, repeat, repeat – name, cookie, name, cookie, name cookie. If a dog seems scared or stubborn, don't force it. Dog escapes do happen from individual kennels, which is why it is very important to keep the outside fence doors closed at all times.

Once you are done with your walk with the dog, return the dog to his outside kennel area by stepping into the outside kennel area with the dog and unleashing him. When moving back out, block the door with your body and close the door and then lock the latch. As a final step, go back inside and raise up the guillotine door for the next dog in the row to be walked.

Here is a video on these steps

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNoZHXLrqv8>

Thank you from MAL

When you become a volunteer dog walker at MAL, you also become an ambassador for us and our mission - so that when someone in the community asks you about the shelter, you are armed with the information you need to help educate the public and encourage further interest in the Milton Animal League and the animals presently in our care.

