

canine questions

By Sharon Harvey

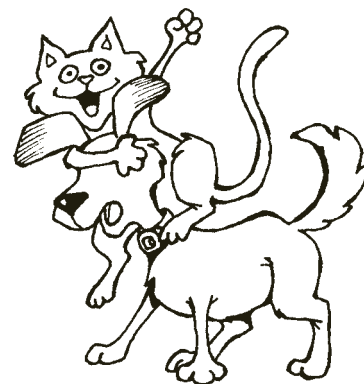
My dog pulls so hard on his leash I may as well hook him up to a sled and hang on for dear life. I'm using a choke chain right now and it's not making a bit of a difference. How can I change my morning Iditarod into a walk?

First of all, get rid of the choke chain. While a very experienced trainer, with excellent timing and knowledge can often use them effectively, which in our opinion, also means temporarily, most owners never really catch on and end up with a dog that has learned to pull just as hard on the choke or prong despite the pain or discomfort. Not only does this mean the collar is not working as an effective tool, it's also VERY dangerous for your dog. Both choke chains and prong collars can cause serious injury to your dog if not used properly.

At Rescue Village, we recommend collars, head halters and harnesses that, used in combination with positive reinforcement training, will give you added leverage over your canine musher. The martingale, or limited slip collar, is similar to a choke, but is made of cloth and is constructed so it can't close unchecked around your dog's neck. While safer than a choke chain, this collar doesn't provide as much control as the Gentle Leader or Halti head harnesses. A strap goes around the dog's muzzle and the leash attaches to a ring under the dog's chin. If the dog pulls forward, its head is drawn backwards toward its owner, slowing its forward progress. While these can be extremely effective, some dogs never or take a long time to adapt to the muzzle strap and, if the head halter is snapped or jerked like many people are accustomed to doing with a traditional buckle or choke collar, serious neck injury can occur. Finally, there are the Gentle Leader Easy Walker and Sensible Harnesses. In principle, these harnesses work similarly to the head halters, but with the leash attaching to a ring at the dog's chest. This attachment point increases the owner's leverage over the pulling dog and, if he walks too far ahead, causes the dog to be pulled back toward his

owner. Most dogs have no problem adapting to a body harness and there's much less risk of injury.

Equipment alone will not fix your problem, though. Once you've outfitted your dog with a safe, effective, pain-free collar, you need to teach him where you want him to walk. Do this by bringing along very yummy treats on your walk... something he never gets at home... petrified hot dog slices, perhaps! Whenever your dog is walking without pulling on the leash, say "YES" with tremendous emphasis and give him a small treat. In the event you have trouble getting his attention, you may have to resort to playing the "Be a Tree" game. Whenever your dog pulls on the leash, stop walking forward, and don't start moving forward again until the leash is slack. Dogs pull because they want to get somewhere faster than you do. If you teach your dog that you will ONLY let him move forward when the leash is slack, he'll learn that's the only way he's ever going to get where he wants to go. Until he catches on, your 15 minute trip around the block might take 35 minutes but your career as an Iditaroder will be over and you can relax and enjoy a safe, fun walk with your best friend.



If you're having a problem with your cat or dog, call the Rescue Village HelpLine at 440.338.4819, ext. 13 or send an e-mail to askthetrainer@geaugahumane.org. We'll help you solve your problem or refer you to someone who can. The most frequently asked questions will find their way into the Rescue Village Reporter's Ask the Trainer column or onto Q104's Ask the Trainer radio segment that can be heard on Sunday's Wilde & Fee Morning Show during the 8 o'clock hour.

Our Mission

To shelter and find homes for sick, injured, abused, and abandoned domestic animals that have no other alternatives

To foster compassion for all living things through education

To reduce pet overpopulation through spay/neuter programs

To prevent cruelty by advocating and enforcing animal protection laws

