

Leash training

Your sweet little Miniature Schnauzer puppy may not grow past 20 pounds but they should still have respect and training of a leash. Proper leash training when they are young is vitally important to your future relationship with your puppy as well as the health and wellbeing of your shoulder joints and keeping your dog safe.

A. We recommend starting out within a few days of taking your puppy home by putting on a flat training collar. Puppies are usually annoyed by these and tend to scratch at them vigorously for the first day or two but your puppy has had a collar on for several weeks before you take it home so this should not cause any irritation. Make sure you do this and the following phases of this protocol in all different situations, inside, outside, at the park, on the sidewalk, different surfaces; different situations.

B. I attach a length of clothesline rope to the collar - but never when he is unsupervised or in the crate - I let the puppy drag this rope around for a day or two, I NEVER EVER pick up the piece of rope or use it in any way like a leash at this point. I'm just getting him used to having it attached to him. He may even play with it and chew on it, which is why I do not recommend using a nice expensive leash for this process.

C. After a day or two of dragging the rope around, I'll start following the puppy around, inside, outside, wherever he goes, and every few minutes I'll step on the rope. I will NOT pick up the rope, just step on it and let puppy go wiggly trying to get away from it. I usually do this for around three days. Usually I try to have at least 6-10 short sessions per day. The reason I do it this way, and do NOT pick up the rope is because I'm trying to teach the puppy that when the rope stops him, it means STOP, not pull on the rope and get a little more slack - which actually teaches them that pulling works, and usually works well if a human arm is attached to the other end of the leash. Our arms by the very virtue of their lovely bendy joints are completely rigged to give when something pulls on them and I don't care how determined you are not to give an inch, your arm WILL betray you, and puppy will feel that slack and boom, he is on his way to being a pulling machine. By stepping on the rope (some trainers tie the pup to a doorknob) you teach them that when the leash stops, it means stop, period, no give, no quarter, no passing of go or collecting of \$200. This step can be stressful as puppy will sometimes thrash around, I just stare off into the distance, and as soon as puppy calms himself, I reward him with my attention or a tiny training treat. I cannot stress enough the importance of never teaching him to pull from the get go - if he never learns, he'll never do it, period. They have to go thru the thrashing around bit to learn that the leash stopping them means stop, end of discussion.

During the first four phases of this process you should also be busy teaching puppy his name, so that by the time we get to the end of this protocol you can use his name to finalize the leash training process.

D. Okay, so you've spent a few days following junior around stepping on his leash, and now when you step on it, he just stops right away, sometimes he even looks to you for attention or a reward because you've been giving him attention for calm behavior, so it is time to go to the next step. You get to actually pick up the rope, don't go getting ahead of me here, you can pick it up, but you **STILL** have to follow him where he wants to go. If you want to stop, drop the rope and step on it- don't you dare try to stop him with your arm - I see you there trying to hold your elbow tight to your body, trust me you **CANNOT** do it - physically impossible, even with a little 5 pound puppy! Three days - now go.

E. Now that junior knows his name, and has learned that when the rope says stop, it means stop, you can go on to the final (but always ongoing) phase. At this point junior is going to go where **YOU** want him to go. He'll go because he is used to following you and because he knows his name and you'll reward him for staying by your side. Whenever you change directions (and you'll want to change directions a **LOT**), call junior by his name and when he gets to you, give him a treat, a lick of some cream cheese or baby food meat on the end of a wooden spoon is my favorite - they love it, and I don't have to spend the day bent over - a win win situation for both of us : At this point you are going to be teaching him that walking with you and being next to you is way more rewarding than any bunny poop he might get to sniff along the way during his walk. Keep rewarding him very frequently whenever he is in the proper "close to you" position. Use his name to get him to come and **BE** in that proper position, reward a **LOT**, frequent rewards (at least 15-20 per minute) are what he needs here. You'll be able to fade the rewards down to fewer and fewer by asking for more and more time as well as more and more correct positioning.

F. Once he gets good at this, my criteria for rewarding gets tougher - he has to be on my left side, he has to be within 24 inches of my foot, etc. When I'm done with this process - and it takes months to get them really good - they get rewarded on my left side, the leash has to be slack enough that the clip part is perpendicular to the earth. You have to take this step on the road a **LOT**, the park, the street, past the neighbor's house with the cat who loves to taunt you. Past parked cars, and moving buses, past puddles just begging to be splashed in, past other dogs, past people who he **KNOWS** are there just to adore him. You can use some of these things as rewards, he does the leash thing right, hey, he gets to go closer to the lovely people, he doesn't keep proper position, the visit doesn't occur.

I know this sounds daunting, but really - do you want a companion you can walk proudly and comfortably anywhere, or do you want to be fighting a pulling battle for the rest of his life? A dog properly trained in this fashion can be walked thru a field of hotdogs and flirtatious girlie dogs on a piece of string - tied to your pinkie! And you will be the envy of every dog owner that is being pulled down the street by their dog and barely able to stay on their feet.