

4 Ways You May Be Stealing Your Dog's Joy

Pet parents are often guilty of making these mistakes, which include not respecting their dog's basic needs and robbing him of the pleasure involved with one of life's most important activities. It's easy to fall into these patterns - are you aware that you may be doing it, too?

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dog walks are one of the most important activities we engage in with canine family members; dogs need and love to take walks and derive huge benefits from them
- Just as some dogs, for a variety of reasons, are difficult to walk, some pet parents could improve their skills as well
- Common dog walking mistakes by humans include not allowing your pet opportunities to sniff, ignoring her, multi-tasking during walks and choosing the wrong type of leash, harness or collar
- Another mistake is not taking advantage of different types of dog walks to keep things interesting for both of you

Dogs love to go for walks, not only to relieve themselves, but also for physical and mental stimulation. As your canine companion's BFF, it's important to keep this in mind — especially if you too often find yourself walking your dog when you're in a rush to leave the house, you're very tired, or preoccupied with someone or something else.

When we're teaching our dogs how to behave at the end of a leash and other do's and don'ts for walking with us, most of us aren't nearly as concerned with our own behavior during these outings. We assume we're doing everything right, and it's our furry sidekicks who need correcting, but have you ever wondered how your dog would rate your walking performance?

Believe it or not, we're just as capable of bad behavior during walks as the other way around. Here are a few reasons why.

How You Might Be Stealing Your Dog's Joy on Walks

- **You put your pet on ignore** — Unfortunately, there are pet parents who do everything but pay attention to their dogs during walks. The activity becomes so routine that they do it without giving much thought to the furry fellow at the other end of leash.

This is a bad habit primarily for the danger it can pose to your dog, who is often busy looking for dead or possibly deadly things to pick up in his mouth, or interesting places to lift his leg (like a car door).

There is also the potential on walks for unexpected things to happen, like an unfriendly dog appearing out of

nowhere or a car swerving dangerously close to the sidewalk. When you stay focused on your dog and your immediate environment, it affords you the opportunity to react quickly when necessary, keeping both you and your pet out of harm's way.

- **You multi-task** — In today's world, this almost always involves a cellphone. If you have your phone to your ear as you walk, you have only one hand available for your dog. And even if you're using ear buds and your phone is in your pocket, it's impossible to be present for both your dog and the person on the other end of the line. Your dog will inevitably be the loser in the deal.

And needless to say, if you're texting as you walk, or searching the internet, or even listening to a podcast or audiobook, your attention is not on your dog.

Multi-tasking is highly overrated as a method for accomplishing several things at once, and in fact, many experts believe the whole notion is a myth, because there is always one thing out of the many things you're doing simultaneously that occupies most of your attention. Everything else fades into the background, including in this case your dog.

- **You don't encourage your dog's love of sniffing** — Your dog's most acute sense is her sense of smell. She explores and experiences the world through her nose. Smell is a dog's "first sense," much as sight is ours. Just as you depend on your eyes to inform you of the world around you, dogs depend on their noses.

If you can imagine how it would feel to take walks with your eyes half-closed, then you can empathize with how it feels to your dog to be prevented from stopping to sniff things. It's unnatural, slightly intimidating and ultimately, boring. Dogs need lots of outdoor sniffing opportunities to help them learn about the world around them and stimulate their minds.

- **You choose the wrong type of collar, harness, or leash** — Many pet parents don't realize the importance of choosing the right type of collar, harness and leash for their dog. Certain dogs should wear a harness and should never be leashed or even handled by the collar.

These include dogs who pull or lunge while on a leash, those prone to tracheal collapse or a seizure disorder, and dogs with chiropractic issues involving the neck and/or back. I prefer brachycephalic (flat-faced) breeds wear harnesses, as well.

Choke collars and other outdated training devices should be replaced with safer alternatives. These collars can cause pain and injury to your dog's neck, and in extreme cases, strangulation.

For walks, training sessions, and whenever your dog will be on leash, I recommend either a head collar or no-pull harness. And I'm not a fan of retractable leashes due to their potential to injure both dogs and their owners. I recommend flat leashes no longer than six feet.

Getting the Most Out of Walking With Your Dog

Just like us, dogs can get bored with the same routine day in and day out and appreciate it when we change things up a bit. Fortunately, there are different types of dog walks you can choose to keep things interesting for both you and your furry companion.

1. **Purposeful walks** — These are typically short and have a specific goal, for example, walking your dog to her potty spot.
2. **Training walks** — These walks can be about improving leash manners, learning basic or advanced obedience commands, ongoing socialization, or anything else you can think of that can be done on a leashed walk. Be sure to bring some healthy training treats on these outings.

Ongoing training throughout your dog's life is a great way to keep his faculties sharp and boredom at bay. It's also a wonderful way to strengthen the bond between you and your pet.

3. **Power walks** — Power walks keep your dog's frame strong, his weight in check, and help alleviate arthritis and other degenerative joint diseases. These walks can also be an essential method for ensuring your dog gets the exercise he needs, as long as you're consistent with them.

Remember: A healthy dog needs to exercise an absolute minimum of every three days (every other day is better; every day is ideal) at an intensity that elevates his heart rate for 20 minutes to maintain cardiovascular conditioning and muscle tone. If your dog is out of shape, you'll need to start slow and build gradually to 20 minutes per power walk.

4. **Mentally stimulating walks** — Most leashed dogs don't get to spend nearly as much time sniffing and investigating as they would like, so allowing your pet some time to explore is good mental stimulation for her. These walks allow her to stop, sniff, investigate, and pick up and send pee-mail, Dogs accumulate knowledge about the world through their noses.
5. **Sniffaris** — Sniffaris are walks during which your dog takes the lead, you follow, and he gets to sniff whatever he pleases. Sniffaris are upgraded mentally stimulating walks, more or less, with your dog making all the navigational and investigational decisions!
6. **Change-of-scenery walks** — Instead of heading outside in the same old direction, buckle your dog in and drive a few blocks away or to a neighborhood park or nearby hiking trail for your walk. Both you and she will find new things to see, smell, and experience.
7. **Walks with friends** — If your dog is comfortable around other dogs, consider meeting up with neighbors or friends with dogs for group walks. Everyone on two legs and four gets to socialize and exercise simultaneously, and dog parents can also be valuable resources for one another.
8. **Different dog-walker walks** — Everyone walks a dog a little differently, so the more members of your household who walk your dog, the more variety she'll enjoy. And since walks done right are bonding experiences, everyone in the family gets to spend one-on-one time with the dog.

A variation on this if you work outside the home is to hire a professional dog walker a few times a week or ask a willing friend or neighbor to take your dog out for a walk in your absence.

One of the most important gifts you can give your dog whenever you interact with him, including on walks, is your undivided attention. Put down the phone and other distractions and let him know through your focus on him how much he means to you.

Sources and References

[PetMD March 18, 2019](#)
