

LEASH BITING

Many dogs will bite their leash. It's a common problem for owners to experience, but it's deceptively straightforward to deal with.

BUT WHY DO THEY DO IT?

Frustration: they don't understand leash information yet. They don't have a clear grasp of how Loose Leash Walking is supposed to work, and so the leash feels foreign and uncomfortable. They cope by resisting and grabbing at it.

Stress: frustration is sometimes also a factor of their stress threshold. A reactive dog, or one that gets overstimulated easily, will sometimes start leash biting as an outlet when their stress rises due to other triggers in the environment. Leash biting becomes a pacifier, of sorts.

Play: they aren't taking your walking work seriously, and they'd rather play. In this case, they view the leash as a toy. So, they'll grab it, shake it, and want to play tug with it.

NO, it's not dominance. Dominance is about resources; your leash isn't a resource. This is about manners, coping, and skill.

DITCH THE CHAIN LEASH

Chain leashes are common remedy for leash biting, but they make it very hard to handle your leash. They hurt to hold onto! Chain leashes also don't really fix the problem, they just cover it up. You'll never be able to walk without a chain leash unless you teach your dog not to do it altogether.

FIXING IT

Understand contrasting energies. It's a simple equation:

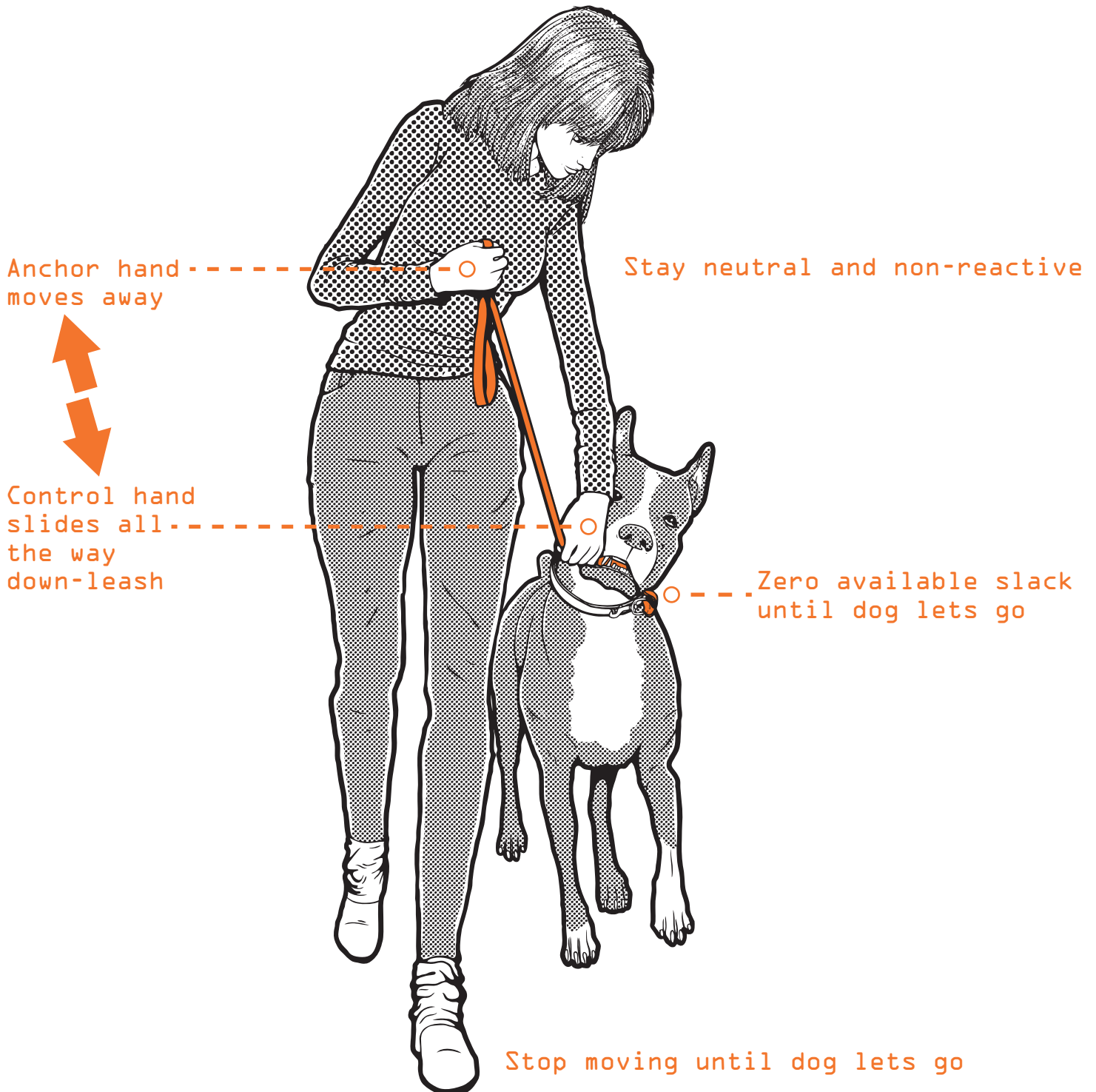
Dog's doing what you want = moving, praise
Dog's not doing what you want = deactivate, dead stop

When we say "deactivate" we mean you should stop, become neutral, and wait. Lots of folks start reprimanding and trying to correct the dog. This usually activates them more, and you just cultivate a more intense version of what you were trying to stop.

Extinction is the course of action here, meaning we make leash biting boring and non-rewarding. And then we show them what IS rewarding, which is waking nicely.

Here are the main steps when your dog grabs the leash:

1. Stop moving; deactivate the walk
2. Say "Drop It."
3. Simultaneously move your anchor hand away from your dog, while you slide your control hand down the leash up against your dog's mouth. There should be zero available slack in the leash
4. WAIT. Quiet your body, shut your mouth, and W-A-I-T your dog out.
5. The instant your dog releases the leash, mark it "Good," give slack in the leash, and start walking. Speed is important here. GET MOVING once your dog releases. Don't stand around. GO!



Thus, your dog learns that grabbing their leash makes everything come to a dead stop. Movement only happens when the leash is not in their mouth.

You may have to do this several times.

You may have to do this every couple of steps, initially.

But KEEP DOING IT.

You must send a consistent message that biting the leash makes the walk stop. It becomes boring and non-rewarding right away. If you fiddle around and allow them to get away with it sometimes, then they know it works sometimes. This actually makes them do it more. It's the same psychology that keeps people pulling the lever on a slot machine.

However, if you are absolutely resolute and consistent, you can stop leash biting in a weekend!

Intensity before Frequency

Always remember that all annoying problems with dogs diminish in intensity first, and then frequency. Initially, your dog will grab the leash just as often, but they'll let go faster and faster, and even be kind of noncommittal about it. If you're consistent, you'll have it sewn up in no time.

SORT OUT YOUR OTHER PROBLEMS, TOO

Good behavior in dogs is affected by their whole universe with you. Problems rarely exist as standalone issues. As always, Simpawtico Dog Training recommends a holistic approach to manners and behavior. Work in one area of their lives affects other areas.

Make sure you're teaching your dog how to walk on a leash politely and how to interpret leash information. If you haven't shown them, you can't reasonably expect them to just magically be good. Take a look at our Loose Leash Walking PDF and/or our online course.

You can double up on this work by teaching your dog Drop It in other contexts. We prefer to introduce Drop It during our Tug practice. You can fix leash biting without a separate Drop It, but the more things your dog knows and can apply in different situations, the better behaved they are in general.

Also, buff up on your leash handling skills. Learn how to hold and manipulate your leash like a pro. Remember: it's not all on your dog. YOU have to improve your skills as an owner and handler, too.

If your dog is overstimulated on a walk and/or is reactive, that's something you'll want to address as well. Having a more confident, stable, and engaged dog during your walks tends to remove a lot of other problems you may be experiencing! See a local pro for help in this case.

GOOD LUCK!