



ASK THE EXPERT

BREANNE TABBERT



BEHAVIOR SPECIALIST

After taking Colby home, his owner, Taylor, was faced with some behavior she didn't quite know how to handle. She reached out to our animal behavior specialist, Breanne, to help her make sense of what she was seeing.

Taylor: How do I get Colby to stop jumping on me and pulling on the leash during walks? Sometimes when we are outside, he totally loses control. He will grab the leash and won't let go no matter how many times I tell him to stop or sit.

Breanne: Over-arousal can be a common issue with adolescent dogs as they try to figure out how to properly engage, play, and communicate with people. When Colby is so excited that he won't listen to you, it is important to figure out how to bring his focus back to you. It's possible Colby isn't being sufficiently challenged mentally and is deciding on his own how to stay entertained. It may be beneficial to try some activities that will make Colby mentally tired on walks, as well as physically tired.

Pro Tip: Bring along a clicker and some tasty treats to practice basic manners on the walk.

T: Thanks Breanne, that makes complete sense! What should I do when we are out on a walk and he starts pulling on the leash? He doesn't listen and isn't interested in treats.

B: It can be very difficult to get their focus back on you once they are invested in something else. There are some preventative measures you can try to stop them from getting to that point. Walking equipment, like an EZ walk or Gentle Leader, are great options because they are designed to give you more control over the dog with less force. Another option could be to start muzzle training him with a basket muzzle. Basket muzzles will still give him the freedom to open his mouth and eat/drink normally, but it removes the ability for him to grab at you during walks. Though some people perceive a dog wearing a muzzle in a negative way, I believe it is a very responsible tool and can prevent your dog from accidentally hurting you when he is in those excitable, aggressive states.

Pro Tip: Training your dog to comfortably wear a muzzle can be daunting, so turn it in to a game!

T: If I see that he is about to get super excited, is there something I can do to stop it before it begins?

B: If you have any inclination that his behavior is going to escalate, I would turn around and walk in the opposite direction and get him away from that stimulus as quickly as I can while also reinforcing this behavior by dropping treats along the way.

Pro-tip: We drop treats on the ground and play "Find It" with our dogs. It keeps their focus on the ground, away from you, and makes them use those super-sensitive noses to find the treats in the grass.

T: That is awesome! I will have to try those things. I think Colby will love having more games to play, but I have to confess, sometimes it is difficult to even get Colby's leash on for a walk. I sometimes find myself dreading it.

B: It can be difficult to look forward to a walk when it's a major feat to simply get a leash on your dog. I recommend using something of "high value" to distract him, like a plate smeared with some peanut butter. As Colby works on licking up the peanut butter, you are free to attach the leash to his collar without him noticing.

Pro-tip: If general arousal is an issue, make leaving for walks boring. Make gathering your stuff a calm and quiet activity. You can even leave the leash out in plain sight so the leash itself isn't an exciting trigger.

T: Thank you so much for all your thoughtful help. You have seriously been the MVP of helping Colby be the best family member he can be, and I am extremely grateful.



Do you have a question for the expert?

Our Animal Behavioral Specialist, Breanne Tabbert, is happy to answer any questions you may have about why your pet is doing that . . . *weird thing*. Reach out to her at Breanne@cuhumane.org!

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