

THE "POT OF GOLD" GAME

This loose-leash training exercise is an easy way to introduce your dog to the concept of “keeping the leash loose means we get to go forward,” with much less stress and frustration than this stage of training traditionally invokes in dogs and humans alike.



You'll need:

- A dog bowl
- A leash
- Treats
- A low-distraction training area. Ideally, the area will be at least 20ft (6m) long, but work with what you've got
- A wearable treat pouch, or clothes with pockets that you don't mind stuffing with treats
- A way to keep your dog in one spot while you walk away. This can be a well-trained Sit/Stay, a sturdy object to tie the leash to, or a human assistant
- A dog who has been taught steps one through three of the loose leash game, as described in our article [Does Your Dog Pull on Leash? A Step-by-Step Guide to Getting Them to Walk Nicely](#).

The setup for each rep of the exercise:

Put some treats in your treat pouch/pocket. Put Sparky on leash, and secure her in one end of the training area (hand her leash to your assistant, tie her to a sturdy object, etc).

Take a bowl to the other end of your training area. This distance should be fairly short to start with, about 12ft (4m) for a small-medium dog, 20ft (6m) for a large dog.

Make sure Sparky's watching this next part, so talk to her to get her to look at you if she isn't already: put the bowl down on the ground, and drop a few treats in. Be real obvious about it.

Then go back to Sparky.

Step 1

Take Sparky's leash. Before you take a single step toward the bowl, take a second to get Sparky engaged with you. Whatever works: talk excitedly, feed her treats out of your treat pouch, etc.

Then take your first step toward the bowl. You'll probably need to keep the leash fairly short; if Sparky can run the full length of the leash and immediately reach the bowl, it kinda defeats the purpose. So if you're using a regular six foot leash, give about three feet of slack.

Feed Sparky a treat every couple of steps toward the bowl. If she hits the end of the leash, stop, take a step back, and happily call her to you. When she comes back, give her a treat, then keep walking.

As long as the leash is slack, you may proceed toward the bowl. When you reach it, say “get it!” and let her eat the treat. Then reset.

Repeat this step for as many reps as needed until Sparky will maintain a slack leash the entire way to the bowl.

Step 2

Reduce the number of treats you feed on the way to the bowl. From every two steps to every three steps, and so on, until you can feed one treat halfway to the bowl without the leash getting pulled tight once.

Step 3

Fade out the treats on the walk completely, so the only treat Sparky gets is the one in the bowl. Repeat this step until you can do three reps in a row without Sparky pulling once.

Step 4

Gradually increase the distance. After every successful rep, move the bowl a few feet further away for the next rep. Like we talked about in the loose leash article in Step 5: Proof It, you're adding Distance, so temporarily decrease the Duration. (That means feed a treat or two on the way to the bowl)

Playing this game with real-life rewards

You can use this concept with non-food reinforcers, too. If Sparky's toy-motivated, have an assistant hold a toy or bounce a ball while you walk Sparky toward it. When you take your dog to train at the park, you can use the trees and bushes that Sparky wants to go sniff as your reinforcer.