



# Low-Pressure Leashing for Fearful Dogs

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## Purpose of This Technique

In a small shelter, volunteers may sometimes need to leash and move a dog who is fearful or cowering in the back of their kennel.

This approach is **not** about:

- Building confidence
- Creating connection
- Making the dog feel better

This approach **is** about:

- Reducing pressure
- Preventing escalation
- Moving the dog as calmly and efficiently as possible

**The goal is not to help the dog feel good — the goal is to not make the dog feel worse.**

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## Before You Enter the Kennel: Your Mindset

- Move slowly
- Say less (or nothing)
- Lower your expectations
- Focus on **body position**, not persuasion

Key reminder:

Fearful dogs cope better with **predictable movement** than social interaction.

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## Step-by-Step: Low-Pressure Leashing

### **1** Use Non-Threatening Body Position

- Avoid direct eye contact
- Turn your body sideways or slightly away
- If needed, bend or crouch **facing away from the dog**
- Show your shoulder or back rather than your chest

Why this matters:

- Head-on posture, eye contact, and leaning feel threatening
  - Turning away immediately reduces social pressure
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## **2 Keep the Leash Neutral**

- Hold the leash loosely
- Do not swing, dangle, or wave it toward the dog
- Avoid hovering the leash near the dog's face
- Avoid talking or coaxing

If the dog freezes:

- Pause
- Stay still
- Allow the dog a moment to process

One calm attempt is better than repeated hovering.

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## **3 Leash Placement: Calm and Efficient**

- Move slowly and deliberately
- Avoid leaning over the dog
- Do not block the dog's ability to move away
- If the dog flinches, ducks, or tenses:
  - Pause
  - Reduce movement
  - Try again calmly

Key rule:

Fewer movements create less pressure.

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## **4 Stand Up Slowly (Still Facing Away)**

Once the leash is on:

- Stand up slowly
- Keep your body turned sideways or away
- Avoid turning to face the dog
- Pause briefly before moving

Why this helps:

- Sudden posture changes can increase fear
  - Facing away continues to reduce pressure
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## **5 Walk Forward Instead of Calling the Dog to You**

- Begin walking away from the dog
- Use gentle, steady forward motion
- Let the dog follow rather than asking the dog to approach you

Why this matters:

It is much easier for a fearful dog to **follow** than to move toward a person.

If the dog hesitates:

- Pause
  - Take one step forward again
  - Avoid turning around or pulling the leash tight
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## **6 Once Moving, Keep It Simple**

- No petting
- No praise
- Minimal or no talking  
*(unless you clearly observe the dog relaxing with quiet, low speech)*

Your job:

- Be predictable
  - Be boring
  - Be non-threatening
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## **When to STOP**

If the dog:

- Freezes completely
- Pancakes to the ground
- Trembles intensely
- Growls, snaps, or escalates

You should:

- Pause
- Step back if needed
- Reassess
- Get help if possible

This is no longer a “push-through” situation.

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## Important Reminders

- This is **pressure-reduction handling**, not training
  - You are not expected to fix fear
  - Doing less is often doing it right
  - When unsure, **be wrong on the side of space**
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## One Sentence to Remember

Calm, predictable movement helps fearful dogs more than encouragement ever will.