

Reeling in the Retractable Leash

By Elaine Pendell, M.Ed, CPT

Retractable leashes, otherwise known as "flexi-leashes", remove control from owners whose dogs lack basic obedience skills and good manners. Moreover, these leashes can be hazardous, causing serious injury to you or to others.

The retractable leash allows the cord to give and take, which can cause the dog to pull. Not only will the dog be 20 or 30 feet ahead of you, he will be pulling you along for the ride! A dog's reflexes are quick. If the dog is already 20 feet ahead when he sees a squirrel or cat, he may pull the leash out of your hand before you have time to press the brake button. This could put your dog in great danger, particularly if you are near a busy street when he gets away from you. Additionally, those long cords can cause significant injuries if they become wrapped around a person's leg or other body parts.

Leash training involves teaching the dog who is in charge. By allowing him to pull ahead on a retractable leash, you're showing the dog that he's the leader. However, true leadership only comes when dogs understand that their role within the pack is follower. Dogs who follow their leader—which should be YOU—even with distractions must focus and pay attention. When they do this, walking becomes much more tiring for the dog since it becomes both a physical and psychological exercise.

Dogs are happier when they understand their role as follower within the pack. Well-behaved dogs who listen get to spend more time with their owners since they are more likely to be included in the activities of day-to-day living.

So, reel in and lock that retractable leash. Or better yet, trade it in for a good 5- or 6-foot traditional leash. Also, enroll in obedience training. It will teach your dog good manners, which leads to many tail-wagging, enjoyable walks for all!

For more information about obedience training, visit www.carolinadogtraining.com.