

Ask the trainer

Before you clip on that retractable leash: know the risks

A goal for most pet parents is for their dog to walk nicely on leash so that everyone remains safe and the leash stays relaxed, loose and free of constant tension. Bringing a dog into your home means accepting the responsibility of keeping them safe when you take them out into your community. A properly fitted collar or harness and a suitable leash help you do that.

Some pet parents choose a retractable or extendable leash because they feel it allows their dog to roam, sniff and explore more freely. And that freedom can be appealing. However, retractable leashes are not the safest choice for most community walks. They can create avoidable risks for the dog, the pet parent and others nearby. In some municipalities, the extended length may also fail to meet local animal by-law requirements.


Photo credit: SeventyFour via canva.com

As mentioned above, the goal of a comfortable walk is usually a loose leash. A retractable leash works against that goal because the dog must add tension to make the leash extend. In effect, pulling is what earns the dog more distance. The design also allows a dog to move much farther away while giving the pet parent less immediate control.

Here are five dangers of using retractable leashes:

1. Lack of control

Retractable leashes can compromise a pet parent's ability to control their dog effectively. The handle and storage mechanism are bulky, which can make the leash difficult to transfer between hands or manage if the cord becomes tangled. When the leash is fully extended, it can be very difficult to respond quickly if a dog moves toward traffic, another animal, a cyclist or a pedestrian. Dogs have run into roads while at the full extension of these leashes. A shorter, fixed-length leash gives the pet parent a much better opportunity to prevent an accident or unwanted confrontation.

2. Entanglement and other hazards

The thin cord or tape can easily become tangled around a dog, a person or an object. If it moves quickly across skin, it can cause painful cuts or friction burns. In crowded areas, a long extended

leash can also create a tripping or collision hazard for pedestrians, runners and cyclists who may not see it.

3. Injuries to dogs

A dog running at full speed can reach the end of the leash abruptly, placing sudden force on the neck, spine or body. The cord or tape can also become wrapped around the dog's legs. If the pet parent drops the rigid handle, it may bounce and clatter behind the dog. This can frighten the dog and cause them to run farther while dragging the retractable leash through a park, trail or street.

4. Unpredictable reactions and unwanted greetings

Dogs on retractable leashes may react unpredictably when they encounter other animals, people or exciting stimuli. The extra distance can also allow a dog to rush up to someone before the pet parent has time to assess the situation or ask permission. The dog being approached may be timid, fearful, in pain or uncomfortable with greetings. Even a friendly dog should not be allowed to approach another dog or person unexpectedly.

5. Safety concerns for pet parents

Pet parents can be injured too. If a dog suddenly bolts or pulls, the force can cause a fall or other injury. Grabbing the cord or tape with a bare hand can cause cuts or burns. The bulky handle can also be easier to drop than a standard leash, particularly when gloves are worn or the pet parent is carrying other items.

Retractable leashes and animal by-laws

Some towns and cities require dogs to be walked on a restraining device no longer than a specified length, often two metres, attached to a collar or harness and strong enough to restrain the dog. A retractable leash that extends beyond the permitted length may not meet the animal by-law, even if the handle has a locking feature. Pet parents are responsible for knowing the rules in every community where they walk their dog. If you are unsure, check the current municipal animal by-law or contact your local Animal Services or By-law department.

Safer choices for everyday walks

For most neighbourhood and community walks, choose a standard fixed-length leash that is four-to-six feet long, attached to a properly fitted flat collar or harness. This provides enough room for comfortable movement and sniffing while helping you maintain safe, predictable control.


Photo credit: Gabe from Pexels via canva.com

Depending on the individual dog and the walk, good options may include:

- A four- or six-foot fixed-length leash for everyday community walks.

- A sturdy, properly fitted harness, particularly for dogs who are still learning leash skills or who may place pressure on their neck.
- A 10- to 15-foot long line for supervised exploration in a safe, open area away from traffic and crowded pathways.

Providing freedom with a long line

Off-leash freedom comes with risks, so when I want to give my own dog, Skye, more room to roam on a trail or in a park, I use a 15-foot long line. It lets her explore and sniff while she remains safely connected to me.

A long line still needs to be managed carefully. Keep it gathered so it does not drag into the path of other people or dogs, feed out only the amount of line the environment safely allows, and avoid wrapping it around your hand. Wear gloves if helpful, stay aware of where the line is, and shorten it well before approaching roads, dogs, people or narrow sections of a trail. A long line should be attached to a well-fitted harness rather than a collar if the dog may reach the end at speed.

BEWARE: If you continue to use a retractable leash

Please understand that using a retractable leash carries significant risks, even when it is handled carefully. If you choose to continue using one, be constantly aware of your surroundings, maintain a secure grip and lock it at a short length before approaching traffic, people or other animals. Never grab the cord or tape with your bare hand. Regularly inspect the leash, collar and harness for wear or damage and replace equipment when necessary. Most importantly, confirm that the length complies with the animal by-law wherever you are walking.

The goal is not to take away a dog's opportunity to explore. It is to provide that freedom without creating unnecessary risk. A standard leash for community walks and a carefully managed long line for safe, open spaces are better choices than a retractable leash. Thoughtful equipment, good leash-handling skills and active supervision make walks safer and more enjoyable for the dog, the pet parent and the community.



Written by
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Corey McCusker, CPDT-KA, LFDM, is the founder of Muttz with Mannerz Canine Training Academy in Stouffville, Ontario. She specializes in enrichment-based daycare, positive-reinforcement training and family dog mediation, helping dogs and their people build lasting, trusting relationships through science-based, welfare-focused methods.

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— CANINE TRAINING ACADEMY —

Dogs looking for homes

Without a doubt, a dog is a real friend. Our dogs come in all shapes and sizes and they all have one thing in common — they all need loving forever homes.

Open your heart and home to a rescue dog. You'll be glad you did.

Learn more about our adoption process

Meet November's featured dog — April





April is an adorable, super sweet young Shih Tzu (three-to-four years old). She came into the rescue with several other dogs from a puppy mill. She was diagnosed with a large bladder stone which was causing severe discomfort. After having surgery to remove the stone, this playful girl has never looked back.

Like most puppy mill Shih Tzus, April has really thrown herself into her new life as a pet. She's full of joy and mischief. She soaks up belly rubs, cuddles, treats and toys. She's up for anything new and loves every new dog and person she meets. Now that she's found her footing, nothing phases her. That being said, she does not like being alone (understandably, as she never had been) and will cry incessantly if she's left by herself. It's fine if the humans are away as long as there's at least one other dog with her.

April is having fun making up for her lost puppy years. She's very curious and will investigate anything within reach. Puppy proofing your home is essential.

April is currently on a prescription diet to prevent a recurrence of bladder stones and requires daily lubricating eyedrops, which are very easy to administer. Her housebreaking is nearly complete — she'll use a pad if absolutely necessary, but prefers regular trips outside especially if she has the example of other dogs!

April's must haves:

- A fenced yard
- At least one other dog in the home

She would prefer to be somewhere where there is someone at home more of the time than not.

If you're looking for a super sweet, playful dog, April may be the dog for you!

Complete our adoption application



Jake
Maltese mix
Small, Senior, Male



Tessa
Shih Tzu/Poodle mix
Small, Adult, Female



Shiva
Beagle mix
Medium, Senior, Female



Ricky
Corgi/Hound mix
Medium, Senior, Male



Jager (Jag)
Pomeranian
Small, Senior, Female



Bear
Labrador Retriever mix
Large, Adult, Female



Finn
Border Collie/Labrador Retriever mix
Large, Senior, Male



Bandit
Collie mix
Medium, Adult, Male



George
Border Collie mix
Large, Adult, Male



Charlie
Unknown breed
Young, Male



Pipo
Husky/Border Collie mix
Large, Adult, Male



Karti
Retriever mix
Large, Adult, Male

Happy tails (recent adoptions)



Bunny



Honey



Honey

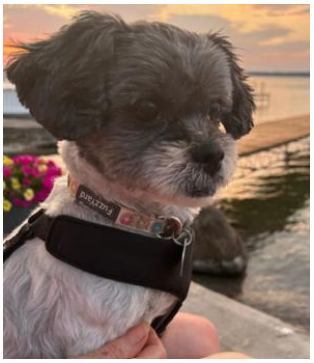


Kieran



Mayo

Adoption update



Dear Speaking of Dogs Rescue,

Kacey, aka Petey, who we rescued from you in June of 2025 is doing great! We cannot say enough good things about Kacey. All six of our previous rescue dogs were perfect, but Kacey is a combination of them all. From the first day, Kacey walked into our condo and said “where’s the key?” He is such an amazing little guy. We would not change a single thing about him. He is perfect in every way! Kacey knows exactly when and where to get all the loving, when to go out for a walk and exactly what time to eat.

We can’t thank you enough for choosing us to be his forever family. We love him to bits. Licks and love from Kacey!

Sincerely,
Donna and Doug

Fundraiser: Toronto Sceptres tickets



Calling all hockey fans!

We're raffling off two tickets to the Toronto Sceptres game on Friday, December 12 versus the Boston Fleet.

Section 100, Row R, Seats 6 and 7 (centre ice) valued at $58.50 each.

Raffle tickets are one for $10 or three for $25.

Purchase your raffle tickets from November 3–23 by emailing Lorraine at speakingofdogs@gmail.com

Many thanks to our long time supporters for the ticket donation that will help the many dogs in our foster programs.

Wiggles and wags



Blackie's Fund Match Challenge

A big thank you is due to everyone who donated to the Blackie's Fund Match Challenge in October. Thanks to your generosity, we exceeded our goal! That means we raised over $30k once our anonymous donors matched your donations. Thank you to everyone for giving generously to Blackie's Fund. It has helped so many dogs and humans over the last several years.

Celebrating 25 years of events and fundraising



Over the years, Speaking of Dogs has held and taken part in many wonderful fundraising events — all in the name of dogs! No matter the amount we raised, we sure had a lot of fun. Thank you to everyone who volunteered their time at these events. Watch our video to take a walk down memory lane

Quilt raffle

Thank you to the talented and generous people who made and donated quilts for us to raffle. And thanks to everyone who purchased tickets!

amazon wish lists

Want to help our dogs?

Consider making a donation from our Amazon wish list of priority dog supplies.

Click here to view list

In memoriam



About Speaking of Dogs

Speaking of Dogs Rescue Program is a Canadian registered charity established in the Greater Toronto area with foster homes across Ontario. Launched in 2001, we are a foster-based, all breed rescue with a focus on senior dogs. We are run solely by volunteers with a mission to help homeless dogs in need by providing shelter or sanctuary, necessary medical care, adoption and education.

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