

Dog: Recall Command



Benefit

Coming when called is one of the most important commands your dog can learn from both a usefulness and safety standpoint. Dogs don't automatically come when called—regardless of how much they love and respect you. The only way to get a dog to come reliably when called is to train him to do it.

What You Need

- Treats or a toy that gets your dog's attention.
- Outdoor exercises: a yard or long line/leash.
- Friends to help out, when possible.
- Ten minutes 2-3 times daily.

The 4 Rules of Recall

1. Never call your dog for anything he won't like.
2. Never call your dog if you don't think your dog will come.
3. If you call your dog and he doesn't come, don't repeat the command. Say it only once, and then make yourself interesting with a cheerful voice, clapping, squatting, etc. that encourages coming.
4. Always give your dog a huge payoff for coming when called, such as treats, attention, and/or something new and special.

TRAINING RECALL, PHASE 1: INDOOR EXERCISES

Exercise 1. Say your dog's name, wait till he looks at you, say "come" in a cheerful voice, and then back away, clapping and praising as your dog approaches you. Stop and reward, and then ask him to sit and reward again. Repeat this several times.

Note: It's best to have two different commands for calling your dog. Use "here" or "let's go" for everyday situations and reserve "come" for times when you need a bulletproof recall, for example when your dog sees a squirrel and runs headlong into a busy street.

Exercise 2. Call your dog from 8–10 feet away. Praise as he comes toward you. When he arrives, ask him to sit, touch his collar, and then give him a treat. If he doesn't come, immediately go to where he is and get him to follow you a few steps back toward your calling location without grabbing his collar (use happy talk, clapping, etc.). Then ask him to sit and praise warmly. Repeat this until he comes on his own to earn a treat. Once he reliably comes from 10 feet, increase your distance gradually.

Exercise 3. Send your dog back and forth between two or more people in a room. Each person takes turns calling your dog, getting him to sit, and giving him a small treat. If he chooses not to come, the person who did not call goes and gets him and repeats.

Exercise 4. Call your dog from different rooms in the house when he isn't expecting it. When he comes and sits, give him a treat or initiate something he likes such as a walk or play session. The important thing is to make your dog associate "come" with good things.

Exercise 5. A more advanced exercise: Practice calling your dog away from something he's

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interested in but can't access. This may be the front door when he's eager to go for a walk, a bone or stuffed chew toy you're about to give him from the counter, his dinner, or the gate to the dog park. At first your dog may ignore you as he stares at or tries to get what he's after, but eventually he will realize this isn't working and will try coming to you. As soon as he does, give him what he wanted. Teach him that obedience is the way to get what he wants, even if it means moving in the opposite direction from one of these "magnets." (Food is not the only reward.)

Exercise 6. Once your dog can do these exercises reliably, practice at other people's homes. Dogs don't generalize well so the more places you practice, the better.

TRAINING RECALL, PHASE 2: OUTDOOR EXERCISES

Exercise 1. If you have a fenced yard, practice the back-away recall exercise (#1 indoor), on leash at first. Give your dog a food reward from your pocket for good performances. When he is reliable on leash, practice with the leash off.

Exercise 2. While on a walk, give the "come" command and then back away from your dog in the direction you just came from. Use plenty of praise. When he arrives, ask for a sit, touch the collar, and give a food reward from your pocket.

Exercise 3. Take a long leash, a section of clothesline, or other rope and attach it firmly to your dog's collar. Go to an open area away from traffic and with few distractions. Call your dog and praise as he comes toward you. Ask for a sit and treat as usual if he complies. Repeat at random intervals.

If, when you call, your dog goes off course or ignores your command, go and get him and bring him back to the spot you were at when you called him. Praise, release him, and practice until he does solo efforts worthy of a food treat. Don't drag him in with the line: it is for insurance/emergency purposes only.

Exercise 4. Once your dog is reliable on the preceding exercises, go to places where there are distractions: dogs and/or people. Work on leash at first and then on the long line.

Exercise 5. Go to enclosed areas where you can safely practice off leash. Start off with low distraction and then gradually add more difficult temptations.

Tips and Pitfalls

- The trick to successful recall training is to keep it at your dog's level so he can be successful every time. Don't try a harder exercise until the one you're working on is a piece of cake for your dog. If your dog has trouble getting a new exercise right, go back a step and work some more on the previous one.
- Never scold or punish your dog for not coming when called. He isn't trying to annoy or embarrass you; you simply haven't trained him enough yet. Plus, you make it less likely your dog will choose to come next time you call.
- Even if you are mad—try not to show it—always try to imagine how you look from your dog's perspective: Do you look like a person that can be safely approached?