

HOW TO TEACH YOUR DOG TO COME WHEN CALLED

WITH JUST 15 MINUTES TRAINING PER DAY



A 3LOSTDOGS.COM GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

As far as basic obedience goes – sit, stay, lie down, etc. -- training your dog to come when called is the most important. It has the potential to save his life if he gets himself into a sticky situation, like running into the street.

But it's also the most difficult to get right. People often say, "My dog always comes when I call him – in the house. But outside the house? Forget about it!"

Does this sound like you? No problem. This guide will teach you the proper way to train your dog the come (or "recall") command, so that eventually you'll be able to call your dog and have him come running, no matter how distracting the environment is.

Note that I said "eventually." Recall training needs to be done gradually. Once you've taught your dog the beginner recall exercise, don't take him to the dog park and let him off leash, then call him away from his buddies and expect him to listen. That would be like teaching a kindergartener his ABC's and then asking him to write a college-level essay.

Fortunately, "gradually" doesn't take a huge time commitment. You'll be amazed at the progress you can make with just 15 minutes training per day. I know you don't have unlimited time to dedicate to this, and I took that into consideration when writing this guide.

OK? Sound reasonable? Good. Let's move on.

First, we'll talk about The Rules - the stuff that often gets people in trouble when they try to train the recall. Then, I'll give you some quick dog training tips, to help you get the best results from your recall training experience. Finally, we'll get into the stuff you came here for: step-by-step training instructions.

RULES OF THE RECALL

1. When in the process of training it, never utter the command “come” unless you can enforce it. When you are training the beginning steps of the recall, your dog needs to be on leash, or in a room where he can’t run off, so that you can make him come to you if he gets distracted. See, we’re trying to build up a history with the recall in that whenever he hears you call him, he comes. End of story. You don’t want him learning that “come” is ever optional.

2. Never call your dog when you know he’s gonna ignore you – On the same note as rule no. 1, never call your dog unless you’re 90% sure he’ll listen. Remember that dog park scenario I talked about in the introduction? When you’ve only worked on low level distractions with your dog, you know there is no way he’s going to come when you call him away from his pals at the dog park. Every time you call your dog and he ignores it, you weaken your recall.

3. Use your cues sparingly – The recall cue sounds like this: “Fido, come!”

It does *not* sound like this: “Fido, come! Come! Come on! Come here Fido!” To turn your recall cue into a powerful tool, you need to say it *one time*, and follow through with it. Dogs are really good at tuning out all the stuff we like to babble at them, and if you use your cue too much, they’ll end up tuning that out, too.

4. Never call your dog to punish him - Doesn’t matter how angry, tired, frustrated or cranky you are. Calling a dog to yell at him or angrily stuff him in his kennel is the quickest way to ruin your recall. Fido won’t know that you’re punishing him for digging up your lawn. He’ll think you’re punishing him for coming to you.

You can see how this might be a problem.

5. Never call your dog and then give him a bath – Unless your dog actually *likes* baths, of course. If Fido hates taking a bath, don’t call him when it’s time to wash him. If you’re heading off to work for eight hours, don’t call him to lock him up in his crate. This will have the same effect as punishment and will make Fido wary

about coming to you in the future. In situations like these, you'll have to just go and grab him yourself.

TRAINING TIPS

Pick a cue that your dog has no experience with – If you've used the word "come" with Fido before, but he learned to blow it off (or learned to associate it with punishment – see rule no. 4), you'll need to pick a new word for your cue. Doesn't matter what you choose: "here," "place," "with me," "ACCIO FIDO!" Be as random as you want. Just as long as you can easily blurt it out and you don't mind blurring it out in public.

Do two or three short training sessions, instead of one long one, per day – Keep training sessions short, about 5-7 minutes, and you'll keep frustrations (yours and the dog's) to a minimum. Leave your dog wanting more and never work to the point where Fido gets bored.

A word on training rewards: When your dog does what you want, you need to offer him a reward so that he'll continue to do what you want. Think of it as a paycheck. In the beginning, we're going to use a lot of treats as rewards, because treats are easy to dispense and most dogs work enthusiastically for them. But it isn't practical to rely on treats forever; sometimes there will be things your dog wants more than the treats you're offering. Besides, nobody wants to have to carry treats in their pockets all the time.

As training progresses, we'll focus less on treats and more on "real life" rewards. A real life reward can be playing with toys, being allowed to sniff a particularly fascinating bush, being given access to other dogs, the outdoors, getting to greet a visitor, etc. Basically, whatever your dog really wants at the moment. Read more about [using rewards in dog training here](#).

Use treats that are small, so that Fido can eat and move on – you don't want to have to wait for him to chew for long. When you're training around the house, you can probably get away with using kibble or pieces of dog biscuit, but when you increase the level of distractions in the environment, you'll want to use better treats. Hot dogs, chicken and cheese sticks chopped up into ¼ inch pieces all work well. I don't like using the so-called training treats from pet stores. They're usually too expensive and too big.

TRAINING THE RECALL: BEGINNER LEVEL

These are the foundation exercises for dogs who have never done any recall work in their lives, as well as dogs who have had some recall training but ran into problems. If you've had problems training the recall (and I'm going to assume you have otherwise you probably wouldn't be reading this), no matter what level you've gotten to before, start here. With dog training, it's easier to build new good habits than to try and break bad ones.

Before we start, here's what the finished recall is eventually going to look like:

Dog is some distance away from you, (whether 20 feet or 20 yards) minding his own business. You stand still, and say "Fido, come!" Fido comes running right up to you. You grab his collar, and then reward him. It's important that Fido is required to let you take his collar. This avoids the common problem of the dog dancing up just out of reach, then running off again.

EXERCISE ONE: BUILDING THE BASIC RECALL

Step one: Start indoors with minimal distractions. Have a container of treats easily accessible. Get Fido's attention: run backwards, make funny noises, even jump up and down. Don't be afraid to act like a goof. A good rule of thumb: if you aren't embarrassing yourself, you aren't being enthusiastic enough. You can tone this down later, but not for the first few sessions.

When he gets to you, grab his collar, then praise him and offer a few treats. No skimping on the praise. Throw a party! Fido needs to learn that coming to you is the most amazing thing in the world. Repeat this for five minutes, and then take a break. This will be your entire first session.

Later in the day, repeat this step for another five-minute session.

Note: You're not supposed to give your recall cue ("come," "here," etc.) yet. We won't add the cue until the dog has a decent understanding of what you want him to do. Add a cue too early and you run the risk of the dog tuning it out or associating it with the wrong behavior.

Step two: Okay, *now* you add the cue. So get Fido's attention, but this time, **after** he starts moving towards you, say "come!" (Or whatever cue you plan on using). Grab his collar, and praise/treat. Repeat for five minutes, and this will be your final session of the day. I strongly recommend you repeat this step over two or three sessions the next day, too.

Step three: Now that your dog is associating the word "come" with running up to you and letting you take his collar, it's time to start using the cue **before** he starts moving toward you. So: Say "Fido, come!" (Run backwards and act like a goof if necessary) then take his collar and praise/treat as you've been doing. Repeat this over the next couple sessions.

Step four: If Fido does step three well, you can increase the challenge and call him from ever-increasing distances. Begin adding some minor distractions, like kids playing in the same room, someone cooking in the kitchen, or other pets in the room.

EXERCISE TWO: GENERALLY SPEAKING

Once Fido is pretty good at step four from the last exercise, you'll need to **generalize** it. Dogs are notoriously bad at generalizing the stuff we teach them. Believe it or not, just because Fido will do a perfect recall in your living room, it doesn't mean that he'll know how to do it in other rooms of the house or in the backyard.

Over the next few days, practice each session in a different part of your house and outdoors, somewhere that the distractions are still pretty minimal, like your backyard.

When training outdoors, always keep Fido on leash so that you can control his movements if necessary. Get a long-line, i.e. an extra-long leash, 15-40 ft. You can buy these at pet stores or make your own out of clothesline.

Training outdoors, you may need to increase the quality of the treats you're using to keep Fido interested.

EXTRA CREDIT: GAMES THAT BUILD YOUR DOG'S ENTHUSIASM FOR COMING WHEN CALLED

Hide and seek: Enlist an assistant to help you with this one. Grab a bunch of treats or your dog's favorite toy - something that will get Fido excited. Show him the goods, and then have your assistant restrain the dog while you run and hide.

Once you're in your hiding spot, yell "Fido, come!" Your assistant will then release him to come find you. Once Fido finds you, have a party! Make it the most exciting thing in the world. Praise him, give him a bunch of treats or play with the toy for a minute.

Tip: some dogs get it right away and will diligently search for you no matter how well you've hidden yourself. Others will need you to start off easier. The first time you play this, don't go too far away, and make yourself pretty easy to find.

Pass the Puppy: Get one or two (or three or four) volunteers. Have everyone sit or stand in a circle, as far apart as space will permit. Make sure everyone has a good supply of treats on them. Take turns calling the dog and praising/treating him. Make sure everyone knows to grab his collar before rewarding. If you're indoors, you're limited by the space available, but if you're outside, you can gradually increase the space between the "players" as Fido gets the hang of it.

TRAINING THE RECALL: INTERMEDIATE

Time to introduce a new concept to your dog: "Coming when called gets me whatever I want." This way, we can take all those distractions in your dog's environment and put them to work for us, as rewards.

EXERCISE ONE

Step one: Get your assistant again and give her a handful of treats. Put your dog on his long-line. Have your assistant get Fido's attention, letting him see the treats, without letting him eat any. Hold Fido's long-line and call him to you. When you call the dog, your assistant should fold her arms, turn away and be "boring." If Fido doesn't come to you right away, gently tug the leash.

When he gets to you, take his collar and give him a couple treats, then say "OK!" Let him go back to your assistant, who should now give him another treat without making a fuss over him. While Fido's attention is still on your assistant, call him and repeat the whole step. Work for 5-7 minutes at a time.

Work on this step until your dog comes when you call without hesitation. The number of sessions you'll need to do will depend on the dog. Some dogs will figure out the game after one session, others need two or three.

Step two: Have your assistant get your dog's attention. This time when you call your dog, your assistant should not turn away, but continue to face the dog with the treats clearly visible. Continue as in step one.

Step three: You will no longer give Fido a treat when he gets to you. Call him, praise him, and say “OK!” Let him run back to your assistant to get the treat reward. Work on this step over several sessions.

EXERCISE TWO: INTRODUCING THE REAL-LIFE REWARDS

This exercise uses the exact same concept as the last one, but instead of a human assistant with tempting treats, your “assistant” will be the distractions in the environment.

Step one: Take your dog for a walk to somewhere like a park, field or hiking trail. Somewhere with enough smells to capture Fido’s attention, but without too many other people or dogs (no dog parks yet, please). Bring some really good treats. Put Fido on the long-line with about ten feet of slack. Let him sniff and explore. Every few minutes, call him to you. If he doesn’t come right away, run in the other direction, making excited noises. When he gets to you, praise/treat and then *immediately* let him go back to all the fascinating smells he was exploring.

This teaches Fido, “When my owner calls me, I get treats AND I get to keep sniffing. Not a bad deal.”

Step two: Gradually (and I do mean *gradually*, no rushing ahead before your dog is ready), increase the length of leash so that eventually Fido is 20, 30, 40 feet away when you call him.

Step three: This is pretty much the same as step one/two. But now, instead of giving Fido a treat every time he comes, put the treats on a random schedule. It goes like this:

Have Fido do a recall twice, treat; recall once, treat; recall three times, treat; recall four times, treat.

This creates anticipation and excitement because Fido never knows which of his recalls will earn the reward. It creates the added bonus of you not having to carry

as many treats around. Be sure to continue letting him get back to what he was doing immediately after he comes to you, every time.

TRAINING THE RECALL: ADVANCED

Congratulations! You've spent weeks or months working with your dog on the beginner and intermediate level, and have gotten your dog to the point where you can call him away from some pretty good distractions, and have him listen! Most people barely get their dog to the beginner level, so if you've gotten this far, I mean it when I say you are *awesome*. Pat yourself on the back for me.

Advanced recall training is kind of tricky, as it's hard to put into neat little step-by-step training exercises. It's different for every dog/owner team depending on how much work you've done so far, your dog's temperament, and your level of commitment.

The good news is that if you've read the guide and put the advice into practice, you already have all the tools you need. You can take the concepts you've learned and apply them to training with ever-increasing levels of distraction. Once your dog is proficient at the second intermediate exercise, you can start working with other types of challenges, like in and around dog parks, at outdoor sporting events, without treats, or when Fido has spotted a squirrel that he wants to chase.

Even as you work on this higher-level training, I strongly encourage you to continue to work on the basics to keep you and Fido on your toes. Play hide-and-seek and Pass the Puppy. Train in your own backyard, working on timing of your commands, rewards, and the speed of Fido's reaction.

People often ask: "When will I be done training?" The truth is that training never really "ends." You can have a basic recall after a couple months work. But if you want a truly reliable recall, it's something you should continue to practice throughout your dog's life. Just keep in mind:

- Create a strong recall by practicing often when you can enforce it.
- Don't call your dog when you know he'll ignore you.
- Make sure nothing but good things happen when Fido comes to you.

CLOSING WORDS

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Questions or comments about this guide? I'd love to hear from you! You can contact me through 3LostDogs.com.

Thanks for reading! Have fun working with your dog.

-Katie Buvala

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