

Teaching Your Dog: Recall

Recall, or coming when called, could be the most important thing you ever teach your dog. Most dogs will come running to their owner when they think it's time to play or eat, but getting them to listen when they are chasing livestock or running into traffic is a little more difficult. This could save your dog's life one day, so it is well worth the effort to take the time to really teach them to come when you call!

What you need:

A long leash (15 feet or longer) or a rope tied to your dog's harness

A favorite toy

High value treats (such as hot dogs, cheese, chicken, deli meats, steak, etc.)

Phase 1: Condition the Cue

- Start in an area w/ little to no distractions –in your house, the back yard, etc.
- Pick a Recall Cue, such as “Come”, “Here”, or the pip of a whistle -do not use your dog's name!
 - Hint: using a short word/sound that you can say several times in a row has been shown to get an animal to move *faster*. Try using a recall cue like “come-come-come!” or “bap-bap-bap!” or a whistle pip like “pip-pip-piiiiip”
- Use something super high value, like a chunk of steak or part of a cheeseburger, as the initial treat. We'll call this the Super Treat!
- When your dog is nearby and not doing anything, use your cue then INSTANTLY give your dog a Super Treat!
 - At this stage, it does not matter what your dog is doing, just give them the Super Treat and lots of praise!
- Pause for about 30 seconds, then repeat 2 more times.
 - Use your cue then give your dog a Super Treat.
 - By the 3rd time your dog should be acting excited when they hear the cue!
- Do this once a day for 3 days, using the highest value Super Treats you can get.

Phase 2: Conditioning the Behavior

- After a few days of conditioning the cue, you can start asking your dog to do a certain behavior (approaching you) to earn their reward.
- Stand about 6 feet away from your dog, and have their Super Treat nearby (remember, a super treat is something the dog would never normally get, like meatballs, salmon, etc.)
- Use your cue, and as soon as they look at you, praise them! They should approach you right away –give them a Super Treat when they get to you.
- Repeat this 3 times, then that's it for the day!
 - If you do this training too often, the value of the Super Treats will start to decrease. *Treats your dog rarely get are more valuable than their everyday treats.*

Phase 3: Adding Distractions

- Start in your home with your dog within 6 feet of you.
- Use everyday distractions, like a bowl of kibble or a family member petting the dog, etc.
 - If using food, put it in a sealed container, or behind a baby gate, so the dog can't reach it
- Make sure you have a handful of really high value treats, like cut up cheese or hot dogs, and one Super Treat.
- Let your dog interact with the distraction, then use your recall cue.
 - If they do not respond right away, go up to them, put your handful of treats in front of their nose, and lure their head around so they are facing you.
 - Run back a few steps so they have to follow you.
- As they are running towards you, praise them, then give them several treats in a row when they reach you.
- Repeat this a few times. Use the Super Treat during one of these reps, so your dog continues to associate the recall cue with the Super Treat.
 - *Giving the Super Treat randomly at this point will increase your dog's performance.*
- Continue this exercise until your dog is able to quickly ignore the distraction. Then you're done for the day!
- Continue this exercise every other day, using different distractions like an open container of food, yummiier treats on the floor, a toy being thrown, someone knocking on the door – be creative!

Phase 4: Adding Distance

- This is where that long leash or rope is needed, plus a harness for your dog.
 - It's very risky to put a long leash on a collar. If a dog were running at full speed and then suddenly stopped because he hit the end of the leash, it could cause injury to his neck.
- If you have a fenced in area to practice in, that would be ideal for making sure your dog doesn't run off.
- Start easy by practicing in areas that are least distracting to your dog, like your yard.
- Make sure you have a handful of really high value treats, like cut up cheese or hot dogs, and one Super Treat.
- Keep it easy by calling your dog to you while they are within 10 feet of you at first.
- As long as your dog comes to you right away, you can gradually increase your distance from them –don't jump from 10 feet away to 50 feet!
- Remember to praise your dog AS they are running to you –don't just stand there quietly, as that's boring and your dog could become distracted by something on their way back to you.
- Use the Super Treat once per session, and use the other high value treats the rest of the time.
 - Give at least 3 high value treats in a row when your dog comes up to you. This will teach them to stay nearby, instead of grabbing the treat and running off immediately.
- Continue to gradually increase the distance they are from you. Sessions should happen every few days for several weeks.

- *Note: the more you practice this, the less often you have to use a Super Treat! See the calendar on the last page to see what this training process will look like over a month.*

Phase 5: Working with Distractions Outside

Once your dog is enthusiastically responding to your recall inside and at a distance in low-distraction environments outside, you can then start working in more distracting places outside. What's most distracting for your dog? A mountain trail? The dog park? The river? Make a list of least distracting environments to most distracting, so you don't jump ahead to something too difficult before your dog is ready. Remember to keep your dog on a long leash until they are coming to you immediately, *every* time you call them.

Least Distracting Places

- —
- —
- —

Moderately Distracting Places

- —
- —
- —
- —

Super Distracting Places

- —
- —
- —
- —
- —

As you transition your training into real life remember that *the farther your dog is from you, or the closer they are to the distraction, the harder it will be for them to respond to the recall cue.*

The more you practice your recall outside, the less often you will have a Super Treat on you. Don't stop using a Super Treat all together yet, though. If you practice your recall every day, bring a Super Treat once a week for a month, then every other week for a month, then once a month, until finally you won't need a super treat any longer.

Recall Games

A great recall is built on a strong relationship between handler and dog. To strengthen your relationship with your dog you have to build trust while also figuring out how your dog likes to be rewarded in different situations. The trick is to teach your dog to WANT to come to you, and build a HABIT of responding. This can be accomplished through games!

Playing recall games

- Treat Bowling –roll a treat away, wait for the dog to chase and eat it, and when they lift their head and look back at you, praise them and encourage them to come over. Once they return to you, roll another treat in a different direction. See how fast you can get your dog to run back to you!
- Flying Treats -toss a treat, wait for the dog to eat, and when they lift their head, run away from them. Toss another treat when they reach you, and repeat.
- Hide and seek (great for encouraging dogs to keep an eye on you, rather than you keeping an eye on them). Praise your dog heavily for finding you!!
- Round robin –stand in a large circle with other people and take turns calling the dog over. Make sure each person rewards the dog!
- Obstacle recall (ask dog to stay, climb over an obstacle, have the dog follow).

Play these games on your walks after you have practiced them at home and in the yard. Keep your dog on a long leash until they have proven they have a reliable recall!

Below is a calendar to give you an idea of what the training process should look like over the course of a month. Remember to play different recall games (mentioned above) daily!

1 Super Treat	2 Super Treat	3 Super Treat	4 Rest	5 Super Treat	6 High Value	7 Rest
8 Super & High Value	9 Rest	10 Super & High Value	11 Rest	12 High Value	13 Rest	14 Super & High Value
15 Rest	16 Rest	17 High Value	18 Super & High Value	19 Rest	20 High Value	21 Rest
22 Super & High Value	23 High Value	24 Super & Low Value	25 Rest	26 High & Low Value	27 Rest	28 Rest
29 High & Low Value	30 Rest	31 Super Treat				