



## Reliable Recall

“Come” is one of the most important words we teach our dogs. We tend to think that our dogs innately understand us when we say it, that they should want to be obedient and come to us when we call, but “come” is just like every other cue that we teach. We must assign both meaning and value to it.

Firstly, coming to you must ALWAYS be a positive experience. It should be one of the happiest, most reinforced things your dog does. Never call your dog to do something that he doesn't like, like clipping his nails, giving him a bath, or giving a pill. It doesn't matter if you've been calling for him and it takes him until the sixth call to respond, you cannot be angry when he finally comes, you must praise it.

That brings us to the second important point: **set your dog up for success**. You should never be putting your dog in a situation where you are calling them over and over while they ignore you. Yes, situations may happen where your dog gets loose and you need to get him back. If you haven't yet taught a reliable recall - don't use it! Crouch down, sit on the ground, or run the other way. Dogs instinctively chase things, so entice him into a game of chase where you are the one being chased. Don't be afraid to shake a box of treats or squeak a squeaker toy, just make sure to reward him with it when he comes so that it continues to work.

Practice success. I'm going to repeat it: set your dog up to **practice success**. That means working small and building up. Put them in situations where they can succeed 100% of the time so that success is what is practiced. Do not use the verbal cue “come” in a situation where you cannot ensure your dog's success. As soon as you start trying to call him in a situation he is unlikely to be successful in and he ignores you, he is learning that coming is optional. Do not practice optional recalls.

In situations where you need to call your dog, but the likelihood of success is low, try other methods instead of his recall word. Try running in the direction you want him to go in, turning it into a game of chase where your dog is the chaser and you are the chasee. Never chase your dog. Crouch or sit down on the ground. Don't be afraid to shake a bag of treats in an emergency.

Remember to also make sure you aren't only calling your dog for “negative” things. Sometimes we fall into habits of only calling our dog to us when the fun is over and it is time to go home or calling them for things they don't like such as baths or nail trims. Call

your dog to you throughout the hike/play session instead of just when the fun is over. Give them a treat for coming and send them back out again. That way when it is time to go, they won't be clued into it by the recall, because the recall is just another part of the fun.

#### Steps to teaching a reliable recall:

1. Start on a regular 6 ft leash. Call your dog's name and at the same time, back up. The movement backwards helps your dog succeed. As soon as he begins coming towards you, click and praise. Make sure you are clicking while they are on the way, not waiting until they get to you. Reward with food when your dog gets to you (you can also pet and praise).
  - a. If your dog doesn't immediately start coming towards you when you call his name, do not drag him to you. Go to your dog (walk yourself down the leash so he doesn't move further away) and lure him with a treat to where you were calling him from.
  - b. If you have a helper with you, you can have them hold the leash so that you can build distance beyond 6 feet (don't go too far too fast!). Make sure that as soon as your dog is called, the helper walks/runs to you as well.
2. The next step is to begin to add a word as your dog is coming towards you. Only add the verbal cue once your dog is reliably coming when his name is used. You will call your dog, say come once he looks at or is moving towards you, and then click when he is almost to you.

The next two steps can be done in the order you choose - they are about adding distance and distraction.

3. Add Distance: Have your dog on a long lead (10 or 15 ft is good to start). Repeat the above steps. Remember, if your dog doesn't come, walk yourself down the leash to him and lure him to where you called him from. You can work up to longer length leads (they make 20, 30 and even 50 and 100 ft leads!).
4. Add Distraction: On leash, walk up to a distraction (person, toy, dog), back up (maintaining a loose leash), and call your dog's name one time. As he turns his head to look at you, say, "Come". Click as soon as he starts coming towards you and begin happy verbal praise. Treat him when he arrives. Start with less interesting distractions first and slowly build difficulty.

5. Give your dog a specific ending position to avoid dines and dashes and fly-bys. As your dog is almost to you (about 3 ft away), cue a sit. Place your hand in his collar as you reward him. Begin to pattern this behavior of sitting upon arrival so that eventually, your recall cue becomes a cue to come *and* sit.
6. You can sometimes jackpot your dog (give him a handful of treats, feeding them all at once. A jackpot will surprise your dog and may speed up his response. Continue to put your hand in his collar as you reward him with jackpots.
7. Optional: Add a hand signal to help your dog out with a visual. Have your right arm outstretched to your side and then bring it in, motioning to your chest or stomach. Use food or toys to tease if you get no response, in this situation do repeat come.
8. Continue to practice recalls in many different situations and keep the level of reinforcement very high and of high quality. Reliability is extremely important in this exercise and requires lots of practice in many situations. Continue your long line practice in **new** places at least once or twice a week for continued success and improvement. Bring extra good rewards for new places, which will be more distracting to your dog. Start with your dog closer to you if he has difficulty coming when new distractions are present. As you gain success give your dog a little more line and try to work up to a distance of 30 feet away on a long line, having your dog come to you without the aid of a lure or guidance.
9. Create lots of distractions and go to new places to practice often. Once your dog is reliably (99.9%) coming on a long line of 30 feet or so, begin to drop the line when in safe areas and practice as you have been with a long line attached. If you need to stop your dog it is relatively easy to step on the line to stop escapes! If this happens you need to do more practice while holding the line. As your dog becomes reliable with a dropped line, begin to reduce the length of the line until you no longer need one. **PLEASE** - do not risk your dog's life or injury by allowing him off leash in unsafe areas because you think he is reliable. Off-leash is for safe places away from roads and other hazards to dogs. It only takes one squirrel at the wrong time, so use caution—even with a reliable dog.

## Recall Games

*Play these games with your dog in a variety of settings!*

**Gotcha** - Cue your dog to sit in front of you. Click & treat as you deliver a treat with one hand. Use the other hand to gently grab your dog's collar or harness and say 'Gotcha'. Make the collar grab a fun game so that when they see you reaching for their collar to grab them, they don't decide to turn it into a game of keep away.

**Round Robin/Puppy Ping Pong** - Gather one or more helpers, all with clickers and treats. The more, the merrier. Each person will take turns calling the dog. Click for movement towards the caller, cue a sit on approach, and add 'gotcha' as you deliver the treat. Caller may use backward movement to encourage the dog to follow. Ignore the dog/no click/treat if they go to you before the cue is given.

**Opposition Reflex** - Enlist a helper to hold the dog by the collar or harness as you run away. When you cue the recall, the dog will be released. Click movement towards the handler, cue a sit on approach, and add the 'gotcha' as you deliver the treat.

**Hide & Seek** - Have your dog sit and wait or have someone hold him. Go hide somewhere easy for your dog to find, like right around a corner. Call your dog. When your dog finds you, throw a party! Praise and treat. As you play, increase the difficulty of the hiding places.

**Run with me** - Encourage your dog to run with you. Click & treat as appropriate.

## Emergency Recall

It is helpful to have a special cue for emergency situations if your regular recall cue fails due to the level of distraction being too high. (Excerpt from The New Click To Calm, Emma Parsons)

- a. Pick a word or audible signal that your dog has never heard before and that you will reserve only for this use.
- b. Choose a high value treat that your dog never receives unless he hears this word or sound.
- c. Give your signal and feed your dog. You are not working on an actual recall. You are simply conditioning the signal by pairing it with the special treat.
- d. Walk away.
- e. Repeat 10 times a day.
- f. After two weeks, test the cue when your dog is elsewhere in the house.
- g. Note the response.
  - i. If he comes enthusiastically, have a treat party!
  - ii. If he does not, continue creating the association
- h. Continue to condition this word until you are satisfied with the response.
- i. For maintenance, feed quick responses to the signal 5-6 times a week.
- j. When your dog's behavior is reliable, you can vary the treat used for reinforcement, but always make it something special.

Secrets to success:

1. Only give the signal once and then feed.
2. Use a treat that is incredibly reinforcing,
3. First test the signal in low distraction areas, then gradually build to higher distraction areas.
4. Anytime your dog is running to you, it's fine to capture the behavior by slipping in your cue. Just be sure to reinforce!