

TRAINING A RELIABLE RECALL

This process should be **FUN**, above all, since dogs are basically after a good time. The more game-like the training experience, the more success you'll enjoy in daily life when calling your dog. For starters, you can try **jogging backwards*** as you cheerfully say your dog's name followed by the cue ("come here"), as if inviting him/her to chase you. Few pups can resist!

"Max, come here!"

* Body language is a prompt that your dog naturally understands, unlike your words!



Saying your **dog's name** should mean, "Hey you, time to listen up..." or, "I see you," but it also tends to suggest "move toward me," unless a recall cue follows it to clarify that distinction. You're aiming to be equally effective when calling out, "... wait," or "sit!"

Think of **distance** and **distractions** as variables that you aim to introduce separately, to the extent possible, as you embark on formal recall training. For example, when moving into distracting surroundings, refrain from calling your dog from farther away than you have before or usually do.

Use the recall term only when your dogs are likely to pay attention. If they're too distracted or distant when you say the cue and consequently ignore you, your words are devalued, or worse, rendered meaningless. You can work from a greater distance and among distractions later, raising your expectations gradually and reverting to easier contexts when your dog fails to take a quick, beeline path over to you. If your dog's response is currently inconsistent at best, consider starting fresh with a new recall term and begin the training process anew. You could also employ a whistle.

The way you say "come here" should be **clear**, **compelling**, and **consistent**. It may help to up your volume a bit above normal levels. Drawing out your words (e.g. "come hereeee...") makes them easier to deliver in a **sing-song** and **upbeat** manner than "come" alone. A longer cue gives distracted dogs an extra moment to pivot their attention onto you, too. People generally find it easier to vocalize "hereeee..." in a higher pitch, as well, thereby making themselves more inviting and non-threatening. With a jovial tone, a shortened phrase, like "c'mere," can be plenty effective.

You can also use a **visual signal**** to ask your dog to come, but avoid saying your cue and showing the signal at precisely the same time. When we **speak** and **gesture** simultaneously, dogs tend to tune into one and overlook the other. If you 'skip a beat' in between, the verbal cue and the visual signal become 'synonymous' and you'll soon be able to use them interchangeably.



** The involved and elaborate gestures of beginner training can evolve into simplified hand signals.

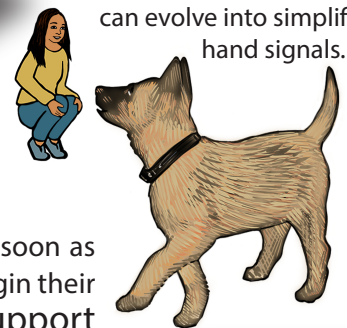
If your dogs have strong play drives, try keeping a favorite tug toy at the ready to lure them toward you and/or to offer as a reward when they reach you. You can use tasty edibles with youngsters and newbies likewise, especially when you're competing with distractions. If your dogs relish tactile praise, don't hold back. Please have at least 10 to 15 seconds of love to give after every successful recall.



Rewards prove you're worthwhile.



Early on, you should begin praising your dogs as soon as they start heading over to you, the instant they begin their approach. Feel free to repeat encouraging 'support words' like "good..." over and over, as long as you're liking the behaviors you're seeing. Assuming they seem on track to finish the task, you can even use a **marker***** as they get closer and then deliver the treat near your core, upon making contact. In new or highly distracting contexts, and when training beginners, it can help to mark the initial instant of **eye contact**, since that's the first indicator that you got their attention. Once your dogs arrive and you've made physical contact with their bodies, collars, and/or harnesses, it's time to show your appreciation.



*** Use a specific marker word like "Yes!" and/or a clicker to mean, "You did it, dog! You just earned this reward!" Raise your criteria for what earns a mark and treat bit by bit.

Troubleshooting & Other Alternatives

If your dogs blow you off, change your strategy before repeating yourself. Rather than risk further devaluing the words meant to instruct them, do all you can to increase your chances of success nonverbally:

- Moving closer will help make your presence felt. Reduce the space between you and your dog by half or so at least.
- Lessen or move away from distractions competing for your dog's attention. All that is likely too much, too soon.
- Act more bubbly, employing bouncy body language and lively, high-pitched vocalizations. Jogging towards your dog and then happily skipping away is sure to attract curiosity. Bring out that latent thespian in you, if need be!
- To promote ongoing progress, use a **food reward** (fresh or freeze-dried meats are especially appealing) whenever you DO transition to contexts involving higher levels of distractions, novel scents, sounds, and scenes, and as you begin to call your dog from greater distances.

Another tactful way to use food is in an **'emergency recall.'** Introduce a unique cue like "now!" "pronto!" or "danger!" in an urgent tone, pairing it with a specific very high-value lure/reward, each and every time you practice. A jar of meaty baby food is an ideal go-to. Start by letting your dog lick at the puree as you back away and say the cue. The more potent the flavor, the more unforgettable the association. It may be a life saver!



In certain situations, such as when dogs keep their noses on the ground rather than looking up at the people calling them, it can help to utter a **no-reward marker** in a calm and neutral tone (e.g. "eh eh" or "uh oh") to let them know they're misbehaving. It's just an error message, not a harsh reproach, and it signifies that they're getting another chance to try again.

Gently tugging on a **long-line** is another way to seek your dog's attention and request a response without having to repeat the cue. It's like a friendly tap on the shoulder... Practicing with a 10 to 30 foot-long line before letting your dog off-leash outside or in any other particularly exciting spaces will prevent them from getting away with 'not listening' and thus becoming unreliable going forward. When freedom is earned, off-leash adventures on trails, at dog parks, etc., entail less risk, more rewards.

Also consider teaching your dogs **"touch,"** a fun and versatile palm-targeting skill, as an alternative recall that often feels more game-like to dogs than the standard recall. Put your open palm a few inches from your dog's nose and wait for him/her to reach out and make contact. Mark the instant you feel that nose touching your palm and offer a treat from your other hand. Repeat this process until your dog understands that your outstretched palm means you want him/her to target your hand, then start saying the cue before gesturing. Work on gradually increasing the distance between you two. Most dogs love reconnecting this way!

Resist the temptation to use the recall term when something your dogs consider unpleasant is about to happen. For instance, if they don't love being bathed or crated, don't attempt a recall when bath time or crate time is imminent. You can, however, teach a separate skill with a different cue whereby they'll learn to willingly enter such spaces or situations. The recall term should always imply: **"If you come over to me, GOOD things will come to you..."**

On the other hand, definitely DO take advantage of enjoyable activities that are about to happen, from your dog's perspective, like outdoor exploration, meaty meals, or a chance to get cozy with a favorite human on furniture. These are all fine opportunities to offer an organically built-in **'life reward'** when your dog swiftly responds to you. Many happy associations will minimize hesitations.

Aim for 5 to 10 stellar recalls per training session and at least one session daily, not including the life-reward training sprinkled throughout your days, e.g. calling your dog over for a cuddle, snack, a prized game, an outing...

Strive for a **4:5 success rate**, at least, when working on recall. If your dog is responding at a lesser rate, the context is proving still too challenging and it's essential to adjust, figuring out ways to make your victories more feasible.

When we follow these basic guidelines, it becomes second nature for our dogs to come when we call them. It's clearly worth their while; they won't think twice. They're not in the habit of pondering the pros and cons of your requests. You've established an auto-response based on muscle memory. A reliable recall is the fruit of your labor of love.

Many thanks for your Dedication to Doggie Education!
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