



TRAINING YOUR DOG TO COME TO YOU

When you want him to and not just when he's ready!

All dogs need a good run off-lead in a safe place at least once a day to help them stay happy and fit and to get rid of some of that excess energy that can lead to mischief making. However, it is an owner's legal responsibility to ensure that their dog is under control at all times in a public place – so being able to get your dog to come back to you when you call him is very important.

Step one - introducing the basic idea that coming to you is a good thing!

- Feed your dog normally (preferably at least twice a day) – if you are worried that your dog may be overweight, reduce the size of his main meals slightly during the training period.
- **Never train him when he is hungry**, as this can make him frustrated and it'll be difficult for him to concentrate.
- Find treats that he really likes – try small pieces of liver, chicken, hotdog sausage or cheese. Keep a pot of these in the fridge, so that you have access to treats at any time of the day.
- Pop some treats in your pocket and at random times when you are in the same room together, call him to you in a happy voice and give him a treat. After he has finished his treat, say something like “good dog – off you go!”.
- Repeat this frequently during the day, for a few days, until he is coming to you quickly every time.

Tips for better success

- If you have been using “come” as a command up till now without success, then this may be a good time to change it. Try “here” or perhaps even a whistle which can be easier for a dog to hear when out on the park. Once you choose a new command you must stick to it, or you'll confuse your dog and he may never learn what you really want him to do.
- Even though your dog may already be happy to come when you call him in the home, you still need to do this initial bit of training and turn it into a great game for your dog. Skipping a stage may affect the rest of the training.
- For now, walk your dog on a long or extending lead. If you punish him in any way for not coming to you on a walk during this early training time, it may undo all the good work.

Stage two – coming when he can't see you

- Now it gets even more fun for your dog. Do exactly the same as in stage one, but start calling him from another room or part of the house.
- When he is coming every time, start calling him from the garden as well.
- Your dog should be having great fun by now trying to find you when you call him. Do this for a week and if he is coming every time as soon as you call, you can move onto the next stage.

Stage three – keep him guessing and he'll try even harder!

- Change the type of treat from time to time and sometimes give him a larger amount than usual as a big ‘jackpot’. Other times play a game with his favourite toy when he reaches you or just give him lots and lots of praise and cuddles.
- If you change the reward every time that you call him, this will actually make him try harder to get it right - just in case he hits the ‘jackpot’ i.e. the treat, game or fuss that he wants the most. Strangely enough it has the same effect as gambling has on humans! You can use this with training any command – not just the recall.
- When your dog understands exactly what the recall command means he should respond to it at speed, every time you use it. Now try it outside in public places.

The great outdoors

Make it easy for yourself and your dog by finding an area that is as quiet as possible. If other dogs are running around it will be very hard for your dog to concentrate. It is absolutely important that your dog gets the command right every time at this point and then you can slowly build up to higher levels of distractions but only as long as your dog keeps getting it right.

- Remember to feed your dog 45 minutes to an hour before training on walks.
- Keep your dog on the extending lead or long line, so that he cannot get away or out of sight. Let him go to the end of the lead and enjoy sniffing around.
- When you are ready, call him to you and wait. Do not pull him to you - he must come to you out of choice.
- When he does, give him his reward, praise, then "good dog – off you go!" and let him go off sniffing again.
- Repeat this several times during his walk, so that he learns that coming to you will not automatically mean it is the end of his walk.

Tips for better success

- You will need to do this outdoors training for around two weeks and if possible, try to do it in different locations – i.e. the park, a friend's garden, a different park from usual, the woods, a country park etc. This will help your dog to learn to come to you wherever you are in the future, otherwise he may assume that he only has to come in the one place that you've done the training with him.
- Never tell your dog off if he doesn't come to you on command. If your dog thinks that you are going to punish him when he does eventually come to you, he won't want to come to you at all. Always praise him for coming to you, no matter how long it has taken him.

Free running – but still in control

When your dog is coming to you every time when called on the long line, you can try letting him off the lead completely.

- The first time that you do this, try to make sure that it is in a quiet area, so that he doesn't completely forget his training at the first sight of another dog.
- Again, build up the level of distractions slowly, so that you can make sure he sticks to his training. If you are not careful, he could quickly go back to old habits.
- Do let him have a little play with other dogs if he is friendly with them. Call him back after a few minutes; he should come to you if you have trained him well.
- Once you are confident he knows his recall command, you can start to gradually reduce the treats – but remember to praise him every time and make sure that he is never walked when he is hungry.
- Try to have fun with your dog on your walks by taking his favourite toys and playing games, getting him to come to you and then letting him go again to play. If you keep his interest with enjoyable games, he won't want to run off in the first place.
- Walks are one of your dog's daily highlights – involve yourself actively and your dog will want to be with you.

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