

Teaching Your Dog to Come Back When Called

Most dogs love running around off lead, but before giving your dog their 'freedom' it's vital for their safety that you know they will come back when called, regardless of what's going on around them. To teach good recall, your dog needs to learn that coming back to you is always a good thing that will bring them plenty of praise and rewards!

How to teach recall

- 🐾 **Step 1:** Make sure your dog knows their name. This lets them know that you want their attention. To teach this, have your dog very close to you, say their name, and then give them something they really enjoy, whether that's a fuss from you, a tasty treat or a game with their toy!
- 🐾 **Step 2:** Choose a word or sound to use specifically when you want your dog to return. Try to avoid using your dog's name as an instruction to return to you. This is because we say our dogs' names many times during the day and usually when we want their attention, however we might not always mean for them to come running straight to us. Choose a short, snappy word like 'come' or 'here', or a whistle if you prefer, but make sure everyone in the household knows exactly which word you're saying or how you're whistling, or your dog might become confused.



- 🐾 **Step 3:** Set your dog up for success by initially training in a quiet place. Start indoors, in your garden, or in another enclosed space with some tasty treats in a pouch or your pocket. If you need to, get your dog's attention with their name, then use your recall cue and take a step away from them. As they return to you, reward your dog with praise and a tasty treat.

- 🐾 **Step 4:** You can practise off lead as well as on lead, but be careful not to pull your dog towards you with the lead as that might put your dog off. Let your dog work out how to get their reward. Make it easy by showing them what you have to entice them to you!



- 🐾 **Step 5:** Gradually increase the distance between you and your dog and the level of distractions you call them away from. To help your dog get it right, and to give you confidence that you won't lose your dog, use a harness with a long line to walk your dog on during training. Let them move away from you before using your recall cue.

Make a big fuss of your dog and reward them with high value treats when they return without this extra guidance, so they build up a really positive association with coming when called. You want your dog to learn that coming back to you straight away is much more rewarding than ignoring you and continuing their fun running around.



- ❗ **Step 6:** Start to gently hold your dog's collar as you reward them – take care to never grab. If you only ever hold your dog by their collar when it's time to go home, they'll quickly learn this and may start to duck around you, stay at arm's length, or avoid you completely! If your dog backs away or tries to avoid you as you reach for their collar, just start by touching it very briefly and giving them a treat straight away. Gradually build up until you can gently hold their collar for a second or two before immediately letting go again, giving a treat each time.

It's a good idea to clip the lead on every now and again and walk for a short while, giving treats as you go, before letting your dog off lead again. That way, if your dog sees you calling them with the lead in your hand, or there's an emergency and you need them back on lead quickly, they'll always be happy to come to you as they won't associate it with the end of all their fun.

If you need to put your dog on lead but they don't enjoy having their collar or harness held, scatter a handful of their favourite treats on the ground and clip the lead on while they're busily enjoying eating! Our handouts on **Handling** and **Harness Training** provide guidance on teaching dogs to feel more comfortable about being handled.



Key points

- ❗ Use rewards that are exciting and tempting, especially if your dog has come away from something very interesting (such as a squirrel or another dog). Try making recall exciting by throwing treats out for your dog to chase and find, or use play and games as their reward.
- ❗ Think about how you sound and appear to your dog when you call them. Use a happy, excited voice and welcoming body language (crouched down, arms open). Moving back from your dog as you call can encourage them even more.
- ❗ Always praise your dog for coming back no matter how long it takes, and reward them even more if they come back quickly! As your dog improves you won't need to give them a treat every time they come back, but remember to reward them every so often to keep them motivated.
- ❗ Use your recall cue sparingly. Give your dog at least five seconds to respond to your first recall. Don't call again if you think they're unlikely to return, as this can have the opposite effect by confirming it's alright to not come back!
- ❗ If your dog ignores you stay calm - getting angry or shouting may discourage your dog from returning to you. Instead, gently guide them in with the long line, or go and collect them. Alternatively, run in the other direction or hide (if it's safe to do so) to encourage them to come looking for you.
- ❗ Encourage your dog to stay aware and focused on you. If they run off ahead of you, try changing direction or hiding behind a tree and waiting for them to find you (again if it's safe to do so).

Dogs Trust provide lifelong behavioural support for all our adopted dogs. If you need help for your Dogs Trust dog please email: postadoptionssupport@dogstrust.org.uk



Your nearest Dogs Trust Dog School Team are also happy to help and can be contacted via: www.dogstrustdogschool.org.uk

The advice contained in this handout is of a general nature and is no substitute for specific behavioural or veterinary advice. If you are worried about your dog, then do consult your vet.