

Training a Reliable Recall

Of all the training exercises to teach your dog, none are as important as a reliable recall. A recall enables you to keep your dog safe by bringing him close to you in unpredictable or potentially dangerous environments. Besides safety, a recall will also help you be more successful in virtually all areas of canine competition.

The primary factor in training a reliable recall is teaching your dog that coming to you is a pleasant experience. Never punish your dog for coming to you, as this will make him fearful or apprehensive to do so. Some owners may inadvertently teach their dog not to come to them by chasing him when he doesn't return as this is often perceived as a game that is hard to stop. Instead, ignore the dog (only if he is in a secure area like a fenced yard) and begin walking away or direct your attention to something around you. This will likely peak his interest in what you are doing and draw him close to you. The most effective method in training a recall is through patience, consistency, and positive reinforcement through food, toys, and/or praise.

Training for a recall should begin in a safe, quiet, familiar location to minimize distraction so your dog will focus more closely on you. A fenced yard or even a room in your home will work. Using a leash in the beginning will prevent your dog from getting too far away from you, and can help guide him towards you should he need the extra encouragement. For fast results, use the Pro-Training Clicker to mark the behavior as it is occurring. Hold several short training sessions each day instead of one long session to prevent your dog from becoming bored. Keep training sessions fun for your dog with lots of encouragement and rewards, and always end sessions on a high note.

Preliminary recall training can be conducted in the home with a 6-foot leash, a clicker, and treats. (Keep the leash loose so that your dog comes to you on his own and not because of tension on the leash or being pulled.) When your dog becomes distracted, hold the treat slightly in front of him to gain his attention. As he shows interest in the treat, back away while bringing your treat hand close to your body. Click and reward your dog with the treat and praise when he comes close to you. Repeat this exercise at a short distance until your dog understands that he is rewarded when he comes

to you. As your dog's understanding grows, the use of the food lure should be faded to only a final reward when he reaches you.

Breeders can also imprint puppies to a recall cue in the home with the help of a clicker. At mealtime when the puppies are excited to receive their food, say your recall cue as they follow you to their feeding area. Click when the puppies have caught up and are close to your side, and then place the bowl down. This simple exercise will help build the association that coming to you when called brings a reward.

When first teaching your dog this exercise, it is not necessary to introduce your recall cue. Wait until it is clear he understands the exercise, and then say the cue as he makes a move towards you and repeat as above. Choose a recall word, like "Come," or "Here," and use only that word to call your dog back to you for consistency and to avoid confusion.

After practicing the preliminary exercise, you can advance your dog's recall speed and reliability with the assistance of a helper. (This method also works wonderfully for puppies to learn a fast recall.) Hold onto one end of a long line and have your helper hold your dog while you run away from them within the length of the leash. Begin calling your dog while you are still in motion. The helper should hold your dog until you give your recall cue. As your dog is running to you, run backwards so you can face him while calling him. If your dog needs help, you can guide him with the leash. Praise and reward your dog when he reaches you. Practicing this exercise will help build your dog's excitement to get to you. A helper can also assist in slowly setting up controlled distractions for your dog. In a secure area or on a long line, have your helper interact with your dog. After a few moments, your helper should stop what he's doing and ignore your dog. As soon as your dog isn't paying attention to the helper and redirects his attention to you, call your dog and reward him when he reaches you. The next progression would be to call your dog to you as the helper is interacting with your dog. It is important to note that your reward must be enough to motivate through each higher stage of distraction.

Once your dog shows clear understanding of the recall cue and what you expect of him, begin gradually moving to greater distances and higher distraction levels. Remember to progress slowly and only move onto higher distractions when your dog is

ready. If you see that the distractions are too much for your dog, take a step back to the previous distraction level and work on it until he shows more reliability. When moving to a new location for training, first allow your dog to investigate the area so he can become familiar with it and less prone to distraction. This will also help you determine what could pose a challenging distraction for you and your dog to work through. The use of a leash or long line is strongly recommended for safety when your dog is in an unsecured area and until you are certain your dog has total recall reliability. If you are uncertain of the circumstances, keep your dog safely on leash.

Your dog should enjoy coming to you and view it as a positive experience always. Reward your dog throughout his life when he comes to you to maintain this positive association. It takes much time and work to train your dog to return to you under all circumstances, but the outcome is well worth the effort to keep your dog safe and under control.

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