



HOW TO TRAIN 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. 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.

What you will need to help with your recall training

- **A 'long line'**. You can easily make one of these with a long piece of washing line and a metal clip, which should be attached securely to the end. If you already have an extending lead then you can use this instead.
- **A flat leather or nylon collar**, or a harness. Head collars, choke chains or half-choke collars should **not** be used during this training.
- **Your dog's dinner for the day** divided into 5 – 10 portions and yummy treats for the later stages of training.
- **A friend or family member** to help with some gentle restraining.

Stage one – introducing the basic idea that coming to you is a good thing!

- At your dog's normal dinner time, wherever you usually feed him, ask your helper to gently hold onto his collar.
- Put one of the portions of food into your dog's bowl, show it to him and back away for about 10 steps.
- Bend down with the bowl so that it is at your dog's level and call your dog to you in a happy voice – using first his name and then a command word, for example "Rover, come".
- Your helper should let your dog go and if he is hungry he should come straight to you.
- As he gets to you, reach out to gently touch his collar (to get him used to the idea of you putting his lead on). Give him lots of praise, put his bowl on the floor and let him eat.
- Repeat this until you have used up all of the portions of dinner.
- Do this every day for a week. At the end of the week, if he is coming to you every time you can move on to the next stage. If not, then continue for another week until he really gets the idea.

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.
- Don't give treats or any other food at any other time during this training. He needs to be a bit hungry so he'll really look forward to you calling him.

- 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. The idea is to completely retrain the recall command and turn it into a great game for your dog. Skipping a stage may affect the rest of the training.
- During this time, 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 that you are achieving.

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 moving further away from him.
- Eventually leave the room completely – your dog should now be straining to get to you.
- Make sure that your helper lets go of your dog the moment that you call him.
- Do this in as many different places in your home and garden as possible. Get your helper to release your dog from different rooms or the garden, as well as you moving about with his dinner portion.
- 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 – introducing the 'sit' command for greater control

- Do exactly as in stage two, but this time as your dog reaches you, lift his bowl over his head and towards his bottom and he should automatically sit.
- When he is in the sit position, give him lots of praise and touch his collar as you put his food down immediately for him to eat.
- If you do this every time, your dog will soon learn to sit as soon as he reaches you without being told. When this is happening you can move onto the next stage.

Stage four – making the recall more reliable by changing the rules

- Now you need to change things slightly to make the game more interesting for your dog.
- When your dog comes to you on command, sometimes clip his lead on before giving him his food.
- Sometimes call him without showing him first that you have his food.
- Other times ask your helper to distract your dog by talking to him or petting him.
- If your dog is still coming to you immediately and willingly, go on to the next stage.

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

- Now you can use treats instead of his dinner in portions – but make sure that they are your dog's favourites. It has to be something that he really wants. Remember to give him lots of praise and fuss as well as the treat when he comes to you.
- Do exactly the same as in stage four but with the treats. This means that you can now do this training at any time of the day, rather than just at his usual dinner time.
- 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!

This is the main part of the training done. By now, your dog should understand exactly what the recall command means and he should be responding to it at speed, every time you use it. Now you can progress to trying it outside in public places.

The great outdoors – one final bit of training

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.

- 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.** He is on the end of the lead, so he cannot go anywhere and he should eventually come to you, if not straight away.
- Give him his reward, praise and then 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.
- 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 and not just trail behind, or run off miles ahead out of sight and into possible trouble.

We hope that this factsheet will help you cure your dog of any recall problems that you may have. **If you have any problems, then please do contact us for further advice or ask your vet to put you in touch with a behaviour specialist.**

You may also be interested in these other factsheets from Dogs Trust: Basic dog training. Microchipping and Dogs Trust Guide to behaviour problems

For more information about Dogs Trust, to become a member, sponsor a long-term resident or help us in our campaigns please call 020 7837 0006 or write to:

Dogs Trust, 17 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7RQ.

www.dogstrust.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 227523

Dogs Trust © 2003. This site and its graphics are copyrighted. All rights reserved. You may print this factsheet for your own information and photocopy it if multiple copies are required. You may not sell it, reproduce it on the Internet, or reprint it in any publication without permission from Dogs Trust Legal Department.