

Basic training: Recall

Recall is really important for allowing your dog to have free time off lead and to make sure your dog is kept under proper control. If your dog learns a really positive response to the recall, you will be ensuring that they will be given the freedom to run and play, meet new friends, and investigate enticing scents – as you can be confident that they will always return to

Building an association

When you are training a recall, you need to build a positive association that will motivate your dog to come running every time you call. You can begin this in the house or garden.

Starting off - the garden



- Take your dog into the garden and give them the chance to go off and explore.
 - To start with, wait until your dog pauses and glances at you, then call them using their name and the cue you want to use (e.g. “Bingo, come!”)
 - When they respond and come to you, give lots of praise and reward them with a treat. Let your dog go off and explore again.
 - When this is reliable, repeat the exercise but now wait until your dog has taken their focus away from you before calling them. As before, give lots of praise and a treat.
- You can practise a few times, but do not let your dog get bored of this as you want to keep this enthusiastic.
 - Remember your dog will be reading your body language and listening to your tone of voice when you are training the recall. For this exercise, you can use a higher tone of voice and encouraging body language- some prefer you to crouch down, others are more comfortable approaching you if you stand sideways on. Experiment to see what gets the best response.
 - When you are confident that your dog is responding to the recall in the garden, it is time to introduce distractions. Initially, you can try a recall when someone else is in the garden, or if you have another dog, try a recall when the other dog is around. Increase distraction levels gradually, making them more and more exciting over several sessions. Use real life scenarios to practice around so it fits into your routine e.g. when children are running around the garden.

Working with distractions

The next step is to venture into the outside world:

- Choose a place which is 100% safe, such as a fenced recreation ground, tennis court or neighbour’s garden so there is no danger from traffic.
- Let your dog off lead, and once they have had a chance to run and explore, call them back to you like you have practiced in your garden.
- When your dog responds, give them lots of praise and maybe a few bonus treats so that they know they have been brilliant.
- Let your dog go off and explore again before trying another recall. It is very important that they see recall as a fun exercise rather than a signal that their free time has come to an end.
- When your dog is responding well to the recall in the safe, free running areas you have selected, you can be more ambitious and start to test this recall around distractions. Like you have already done at home, increase distraction levels slowly. Start with allowing plenty of space between you and the distraction, aim to decrease this over time.
- You may want to use an extendable lead or a training line until you are confident your dog will recall to you.

Recall training using toys

A lot of dogs see food as a high-value reward, but if your dog has a favourite toy you can use it to motivate them to come back to you.

- Call your dog, and when they come close to you, show them the toy.
- If it is a ball, you can throw it, or if it is a tug toy you can reward them with a game.
- The big advantage of this is that your dog sees the recall as fun.
- Only use a ball if your dog is coming back to you with it. If they aren't and they really like balls; use a ball on a string – you can make the string longer by adding an old lead and you will still have the other end to draw them into you.

Overcoming recall problems

If you have worked at your recall training from an early age, you should have built up a reliable response. However, there are times where a dog may have something more interesting to do than come back to you (see Coping with adolescence handout)! Here are a few pointers to help.

Always go back to basics and retrain the recall so that you build up a good response. This is far more effective than shouting at your dog and getting no response, as this simply builds up a pattern where your dog thinks it is OK to ignore you.

Try the following to improve your dog's recall:

- Restrict your outings to safe, enclosed areas with minimal distractions so you can build up a better response. The more success you have, i.e. the more times your dog responds to the recall, the more likely they are to keep coming to you. You are building up a cycle of desirable behaviour rather than allowing them to keep repeating the behaviour you do not want.
- Arm yourself with some 'special' treats (i.e. more than just their feed - chicken, ham, cheese, etc.) and use them only for recalls. This should help to boost your dog's motivation to return to you.
- If your dog is slow to respond, make yourself irresistible. Jump up or down, be exciting and engaging. As tempting as it is, don't just nag them by consistently calling their name when they aren't responding.
- Read the situation and only call your dog when you have a good chance of a positive response. For example, if your dog is playing with another dog and has a history of poor recalls; your chances of success are minimal. In this instance, it is far better to go and get your dog rather than the recall being unsuccessful.
- Try calling your dog when you are out of their sight, but you should still be able to see them.
- Never punish or shout at your dog for not returning - they will only form a negative association with returning to you and be less likely to want to come back to you.

Contact the **Family Dog Team** for more information on teaching recall or for resolving recall problems.

If your dog runs off

- Try *not* to panic, as this will affect your voice.
- Return to the area you last saw your dog and wait for half an hour. The chances are that your dog will start retracing their steps to the last point of contact. It is important that you stay put and give ample opportunity for your dog to find you.
- Dogs often run back home or to where the car is parked, so phone home and check the car.
- Voice recall: Use lots of encouragement, toys and treats as appropriate and give lavish praise if your dog returns. *Do not punish.*
- If possible, enlist someone to help look for the dog.
- Phone the local **Dog Warden** and your **microchip company**.
- Phone around local Vets.
- Phone around local Kennels and Rescue Organisations.