Getting your dog to come reliably when called

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The recall, or getting your dog to come when called, is one of the most vital things she will ever learn. If your gate is left open by accident, or you see danger approaching while your dog is off lead at the park, or your dog slips out of her collar or harness, having a dog who will come when you call, no matter what, can save her life.

Recalls should always be fun for your dog; he should want to come when you call. To rev up your dog's enthusiasm always reward with praise and a food treat after you call your dog and he comes to you.

Never call your dog to you when you are going to do something she does not enjoy, like giving her a bath or clipping her nails. If you don't want to destroy your recall its best just to go and get her for these things.

Avoid shouting at your dog once he has come to you. Having to call and call your dog for ages, before getting a response from him is really frustrating! The normal reaction, when he eventually comes to you, is to let him know how upset you are, but don't give in to this temptation. If you do this, what your dog learns is that coming when you call predicts unpleasant behaviour from you and will make the problem worse. When your dog has come back to you, he has done the right thing, and should always be praised and rewarded for this in order to encourage him to repeat his good behaviour, no matter how long it took!

Praise and treats are your first tools to use for encouraging happy, fast recalls. Dogs also love to frolic and play games, so crouching down on your haunches and calling your dog in a happy, excited, playful voice will encourage her to come to you. Playing games with your dog is also a

great tool. While calling your dog, run away from her and let her chase you, most dogs love this game. At home, hide away, e.g. behind a door, and call your dog to come and find you.

The other key to solid recalls is practice, practice, practice. The more times a dog repeats a behaviour and has something good, like praise, treats or games, happen as a result, the more reliable that behaviour becomes. Aim to do one recall with your dog every day.

Lots of owners inadvertently destroy their dog's recall at the park. They take the dog to the park, let him off lead, let him run around and play freely and then, when they are ready to go home, they call the dog, snap on the leash and leave. The dog learns that coming when called predicts the end of the fun and the next time you take him to the park, you might find your dog heading off in the opposite direction when you call him. Overcome this problem by calling your dog to you often during his play session, praise and reward him and release him to go and play again. This way your dog will never know which recall is the 'home-time' recall and will be eager to come to you for a yummy morsel or some attention.

For dogs who just don't come when called, even when you have treats, or run away, the best way to start developing your recall is to work with your dog on a long line or extendable leash at first, rather than off leash. Put your dog on the long line at home, where there are few distractions and call her, if she does not respond keep calling and gently use the line to reel her in. Once she reaches you give her lots of praise and a treat. Repeat this exercise until she comes reliably and you don't need to use the line to get her to come to you any more. You are now ready to practice off lead at home. Once the off lead recall is reliable at home then take your recall to the park. Do use the long line at first, as there are a lot more distractions and temptations at the park than at home, and only let her off lead once she has a reliable recall with the long line on.

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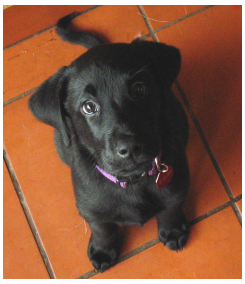
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