

Teaching ‘Come’

By Sherry Woodard

The best way to have your dog come reliably is to make it a party every time you call her and she comes to you. Whether the party involves giving treats, affection, praise or toys, she should never have a reason to think twice about coming to you.



To teach your dog to come, prepare yourself for the lesson with pea-sized treats in a treat pouch you wear and/or a favorite toy tucked in your pocket. Take the dog somewhere with few distractions. I tether the dog to me, a doorknob or a chair leg so she won't wander off. Say "come" (or her name) only once, but say it with great enthusiasm and wave treats right in front of the dog's nose. Reward her with a treat when she comes and repeat the exercise. If she does not come within a few seconds after you say "come," don't repeat the cue. Just wait until she comes, reward her, and start again. Do this over and over; to keep it fun, always use a happy tone.

When she comes consistently with only a short distance between you, gradually increase the distance and repeat the exercise. The length of leash can grow to a 20- to 30-foot-long line with improved skills at learning the cue. A dog should never be allowed off-leash, or at least never be asked to come when off-leash, until she has perfect recall on leash.

Once you have practiced in locations with few distractions, start practicing in locations with more distractions. Then, add other people to the game of learning. Start with the exercise described above: Have a friend stand near the dog and instruct him/her to say "come" and give her a treat when she complies. Next, stand a short distance from your friend and alternate saying "come" and giving treats. You and your friend can start moving farther away from each other and have the dog on a long leash so she can run between you for fun and treats. This can grow into a long-distance game of recall. It's a great way for your dog to interact, exercise and learn to enjoy more people.

One of the reasons that "come" can be challenging to teach is that much of the time, it is used to interrupt what a dog thinks is fun. For instance, say your dog is running in the yard, barking at the neighbor's cat. You respond by yelling, "Stop that and come in the house!" For the dog, continuing to bark at the cat is a lot more fun than responding to your stern tone of voice. So, call your dog in a cheerful voice and reward her generously when she comes.

To create a positive association with "come," don't use it casually. "Come" can be a lifesaving cue if your dog is in danger. Practice until it becomes a reflex for the dog.

Remember to keep all learning as fun as possible. Use a happy tone, be patient, and keep lessons short and frequent.

Sherry Woodard is the animal behavior and training consultant at Best Friends. She develops resources and provides consulting services nationally to help achieve Best Friends' No More Homeless Pets mission.

See also: [Why We Use Relationship-Based Training](#)
[Teaching Your Dog Basic Cues](#)