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## Come When Called

Training a dog to "come" when called, presumes that the dog is off-leash and at some distance from the owner. Initially, all off-leash training should be done in confined areas (houses, yards, dog parks, etc.) so that the dog will come to no harm should the owner lose control. Until the owner can quickly and reliably (100% of the time) gain control over the dog, it would be foolish to let the dog off-leash in a park or beach. When training in confined areas, introducing a variety of distractions, such as other dogs, people, or bouncing tennis balls, may test the dog's reliability.

Once the owner decides that they have developed sufficient control over the dog to let it off-leash in relatively safe, yet unconfined areas, they must pay absolute attention to the dog. It is no good being able to control the dog within two seconds if the owner is daydreaming and does not notice the dog running away and therefore gives no command. Be alert to the dog's intentions signals. Control the dog before it runs off. Regularly check the dog's response by periodically instructing it to "sit" or "come". Remember accidents happen very quickly. It only takes one or two seconds for a dog to chase a cat across the street and be squashed by a car. Be careful and pay constant attention.

### Simple Recall

The first step is to practice a simple recall. Give the dog a couple of treats for free, then quickly move away a few yards and say "Come Here". Hold the food treat in an outstretched hand at nose level, praise the dog all the time that it approaches and give it the food as soon as it arrives. Once the dog comes readily, add a sit on the end of the recall. The exercise may be repeated several times in a row with the owner quickly running backwards between recalls.

At a more advanced level of training the dog may be instructed to sit-stay until called. Repeat this sequence many times over throughout the day, especially before meals and walks and immediately upon returning home from work. At first, make certain this exercise is performed at times when the dog is really going to want to come. Once the dog is responding with some degree of regularity, it is time to start to thin out the food rewards. The owner should reserve food rewards for the dog's better responses i.e., only those times when the dog "comes" and "sits" with one happily. During maintenance training, on average the dog should receive one food treat per every five times that he comes obediently.

### To-and-Fro and Round-Robins Recalls

Now that the dog understands the rudiments of the exercise, it is time to make it fun. One way to liven up the proceedings is to introduce more people to the training exercise. A very simple, yet extremely enjoyable exercise is a back and forth recall. Two owners stand ten yards or so apart. One person calls the dog to "come" and instructs it to "sit" and "stay" and then the other person does likewise. At first this exercise should be performed in confined areas: houses, yards and dog-parks. When the dog begins to respond reliably, this exercise is an extremely efficient way to exercise the most active of dogs. The two owners go for an afternoon stroll and walk about twenty-five yards apart and the dog is called back and forth between them as they walk. The dog will love this exercise. However if the dog is repeatedly called back and forth between two people, in its exuberance it may begin to anticipate commands by madly rushing back and forth like a drained yo-yo. To prevent this, the trainers must make sure that the dog stays until it is told to leave. If the dog jumps the gun, the owner must call it back into a "sit-stay".

Alternatively, the trainer may wish to vary the routine a little and do a little heeling or some other commands between recalls. An additional way to make the dog stop and think is to perform the exercise with more than two people, a round robin recall. With three or more people training, when told to Go to Trainer B, the dog cannot simply run to the other person, instead it must wait and find out

which person calls. This is ideal training exercise because all family members can participate. This helps assure that all members of the family are treating the dog the same. If the dog is a little recalcitrant at approaching one family member, then that person needs to do more work with the dog. All participants can watch and judge individual performances and make sure that only the better recalls are reinforced with food rewards (about one in five at the most) and that the dog receives jackpot rewards for the best recalls.

## **Integrated Recall**

It is ironic that some owners experience great difficulties getting their dog to obey at all, let alone when it is in the park, or has escaping to the street, yet the same dog willingly comes in a flash in response to "commands" like "Dinner time", "Walkies", or "Give Daddy a Kiss" etc. It is a shame for the owner to waste those times when they know the dog will come; rather than saying "Din-din" or "Walkies", the owner should happily herald such events with the cheerful announcement "Come here". Before giving any clue that a walk is in the offing (e.g. Putting on coat, jangling keys or picking up the leash), call the dog to "come". If it comes, hold out the leash and instruct it to sit, put on the leash and go out for a walk. If the dog does not come, pick up the leash and quickly throw it down. Go back to the newspaper once more and ignore the dog. The dog will regard its owner suspiciously, perhaps musing "How come my owner picked up my leash and now we are not going for a walk?" The next "come here" usually produces an immediate response.

In terms of ruining obedience commands, perhaps one of the worst things an owner can do is let the dog run off-leash unattended for any amount of time, whether it is running in the park, romping on the beach or playing with other dogs. The dog quickly learns that good times do not include the owner. In fact, it is usually the owner that signals the end of this short-lived freedom by ordering the dog to "come". It is not long before the dog realizes that the words "come here" are bad news. Rather the owner should try to be part of the dog's good times, such that the dog may develop the confidence to realize that it is not the end of the world -just because the owner called the dog to come, but rather the owner's presence can make things more enjoyable. The owner cannot possibly let an activity, such as running free and playing with other dogs, become a distraction to training. Instead they should use it as a reward. The owner must try to communicate the message to the dog, that if it comes when called, it will receive plentiful praise, a pat, a scratch and a food treat and then be allowed to resume its play session once more.

To teach this, the owner should invite another dog plus its owner to the house to play/train. The owners let the dogs play for a few minutes and then owner A calls dog A. Not surprisingly it probably will not want to come because: a) it is having a good time elsewhere; b) it feels that its owner wants to spoil that dog B, which curtails the play session and minimizes distractions. Meanwhile, owner A continues to call the dog and eventually it will come (if only out of boredom). As it does so, it is showered with praise. When it arrives, it is given a scratch behind the ear, a food treat and then immediately told to "go play". At this point, many dogs look at their owners in disbelief and are reluctant to leave, so owner B releases dog B and the play session resumes. After the dog's have been playing for a minute or so, owner A calls dog A once more and the process is repeated. The first couple of tries are often much like pulling teeth but by the fourth or fifth recall the dog starts to come not only speedily but willingly. The dog now has the confidence to approach its owner when called because it has learned that it is not "the end of the world" and that in the majority of cases, it will be allowed to resume playing. At this stage the dog may now be told to sit and stay for a short period of time before being given the release command.

The exercise should first be performed indoors, then in the yard and then in the other dog's house and yard. Once both dogs perform reliably in all these situations, the next step is to take the two dogs to the dog park just prior to their evening procedure. Other dogs in the park will tend to enjoy this exercise as well. The next step is to take the dogs on a walk and to periodically call back one or the other of the dogs every few minutes or so. By this time the dogs will feel quite confident and happy about returning to their respective owners.

## **Common Mistakes**

There are some misguided people that intentionally punish their dog when it comes. Often this is done when the dog has misbehaved (especially chewed or soiled the house). The owner shouts: "Come Here, Bad Dog!" and when it arrives, they begin to abuse it. After the dog has been clobbered once or twice for complying, not surprisingly, it is reluctant to do so again. Another classical example occurs

when the owner tells the dog to "Come" and it runs off. The next time, the dog will take even longer to come back. Many owners unintentionally punish their dogs for coming in a variety of ways. A common example is the owner that calls the dog and then confines it as they leave the house for an extended period of time. If this is necessary, it is a better idea to give the dog a "go to " or a "place" command, such as "go outside" or "go to the kitchen" and not have to ruin an otherwise rapid recall.