

Recall - getting your dog to come back to you

Most dogs love running around off the lead, but before you give your dog their 'freedom' it's vital for their safety that you know they will come back when called, regardless of where they are and what's going on around them.

To teach good recall your dog needs to learn that coming back to you is always a good thing, something that will bring them plenty of praise and rewards.

Method

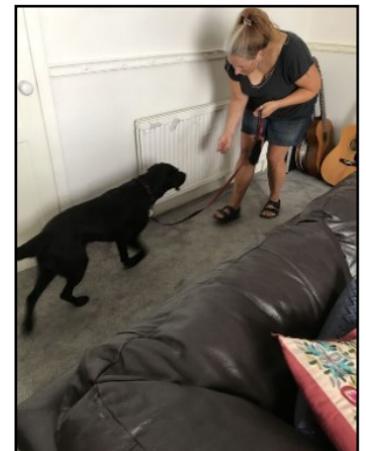
- First of all, ensure that your dog knows their name. This lets them know that you want their attention. To teach this have your dog very close to you, say their name and reward them with something they really enjoy – whether a fuss from you, a tasty treat or a game with their toy!



- Choose a special word or sound to use specifically when you want your dog to return. Try to avoid using your dog's name as an instruction to return to you, because we say our dogs' names so many times during the day and usually when we specifically want their attention, however we might not always mean for them to come running straight to us. Choose a short, snappy word like "come" or "here", or a whistle if you prefer but just make sure everyone in the household knows exactly which word you're saying or exactly how you are whistling, or your dog might get confused



- Start indoors, in your garden or another enclosed space with some tasty treats in a pouch or your pocket. If you need to, get your dog's attention with their name, then use your recall cue and take a step away from them. As they return to you reward with praise and a tasty treat.



- You can practice off-lead as well as on-lead but be careful not to pull your dog towards you with the lead as that might put your dog off – let them work out how to get their reward and make it easy for them by showing them what you have for them to entice them to you!



- ❁ Gradually increase the distance between you and your dog and the level of distractions you call them away from.



- ❁ To help your dog get it right, and to give you confidence that you won't lose your dog, use a harness with a long line to walk your dog on during training. Let them move away from you before using your recall cue, if they ignore you very gently guide them back to you with the long line and reward them once they are with you. This will prevent your dog getting rewarded by the environment for ignoring you! Make a big fuss of them and reward with high value treats when they return without this extra guidance so they build up a really positive association with coming when called. You want your dog to learn that coming back to you straight away is much more rewarding than ignoring you and continuing their fun running around.

Key points

- ❁ Think about how you sound and appear to your dog when you call them. Use a happy, excited voice and welcoming body language (crouched down, arms open) to train recall. Moving back from your dog as you call can encourage them even more.
- ❁ Always praise your dog for coming back no matter how long it takes and reward them even more if they come back quickly. As your dog improves you won't need to give them a treat every time they come back but remember to reward them every so often to keep them motivated.
- ❁ Use rewards that are exciting and tempting for recall, especially if your dog has come away from something especially interesting (e.g. a squirrel or another dog). Try making your recall exciting by throwing their treats out for



them to chase, find and eat, or using play or games as their reward.

- ❃ Set your dog up for success by initially training in a quiet place when your dog is already looking over at you, and gradually increase the level of distraction as they improve.
- ❃ Make recall a fun part of the walk, not just something you do when its home time! Do this by calling your dog back then allowing them to go and play again several times during a walk, but not to the point where they get bored. If you only ever call them at the end of
- ❃ Start to gently hold – take care to never grab - your dog’s collar as you reward them. If you only ever hold your dog by their collar when it’s time to go home they’ll quickly learn this and start to duck around you, stay at arm’s length or avoid you completely! If your dog backs away or tries to avoid you as you reach for their collar just start by touching it very briefly and giving them a treat straight away. Gradually build up to being able to touch their collar for a little longer until you can gently hold it for a second or two before immediately letting go again – giving a treat each time. It’s also a good idea to clip the lead on every now and again and walk on-lead for a short while, giving treats as you go, before letting your dog off-lead again. That way, if they see you calling them with the lead in your hand, or if there’s an emergency and you need them back on-lead quickly, they’ll always be happy coming to you and being put back on-lead as they won’t associate it with the end of all their fun.
- ❃ **If you need to put your dog on-lead but they don’t enjoy having their collar or harness held scatter a handful of their favourite treats on the ground and clip the lead on while they’re busily enjoying eating!**



- ❃ Use your recall cue sparingly, give your dog **at least five seconds** to respond to your first recall. Don’t call again if you think they’re unlikely to return, as this can have the opposite effect by confirming it’s alright to not come back.
- ❃ If your dog ignores you **stay calm**, getting angry or shouting will only discourage your dog from returning to you. Instead, gently guide them in with the long line, or go and collect them. Alternatively, run in the other direction or hide (if safe to do so) to encourage them to come looking for you.
- ❃ Encourage your dog to stay aware and focused on you. If they run off ahead of you try changing direction or hiding behind a tree and waiting for them to find you (if safe to do so).

These resources have been created by Dogs Trust using the most up-to-date scientific-based understanding of dog behaviour and welfare needs and can be freely downloaded by anyone interested in learning more about understanding dog behaviour and training dogs.