

Come When Called

#1 Pick a hand signal and a recall command that is to be used only when training.

I recommend a low hand signal (pictured here) so that your dog can see it. I also find this helps eliminate “drive-by” recalls by giving the dog a focal point to run to. At the same time, choose a special command for calling your dog to come. I really like “Rover, Come” but other people like to use “Here” or “Come, come, come”.



#2 Practice calling your dog away from distractions on your 6 foot leash.

Now that you have established a bit of history, begin calling your dog when they are not looking at you. Start with the dog just outside on a walk, but introduce planned distractions that are easily controlled. Planned distractions should be placed outside of leash range so your dog cannot get to them; instead the dog must “choose” you and your treats. Things I like to start with are: treats, toys, and smells. Then work your way up to other dogs across the street or people across the street.

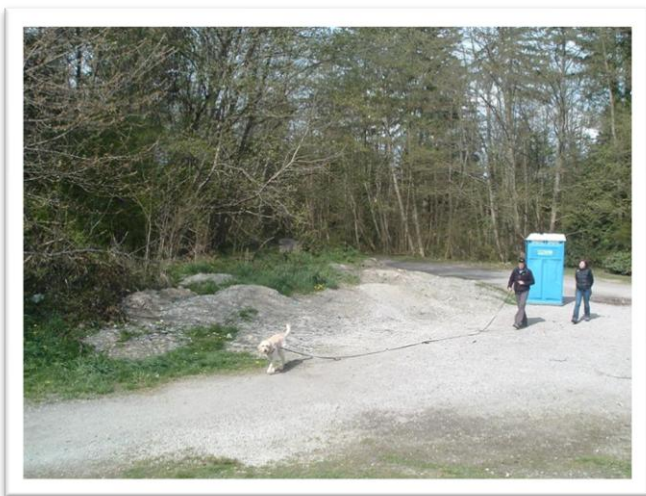
Remember, you really need to do this on your 6 foot leash - a lot.

#3 Practice calling your dog from a distance.

When you are further away, you are less interesting, so we need a safe way to practice recalls from a distance. Lots of people choose tennis courts or fields where there are no other dogs or people.

To introduce recalls at a regular park, I suggest using a long leash. A 20-30 foot rope is preferable. That way, when you think your dog is doing well, you can easily drop the leash and let it drag around.

Also, you need to attach your dog to a harness. It is not safe to attach a 30 foot rope to a collar as the dog will get quite a jerk if they bolt to the end. If you have a very large dog, consider purchasing a Miracle Harness (an anti-pulling harness) so that you can hold onto the rope when your dog hits the end. Never attach a long leash to a face halter (gentle leader or halti).



#4 Introduce Rewards Other than Treats.

Although most dogs love food, most owners don't want to carry it around forever. Begin mixing in rewards other than food for coming when called. Rewards can be anything your dog likes. Here are my top 4:

- **Toy games or chasing games.** Play is always better than a treat. Play tug, "toss-away" (for those that don't retrieve), play with some body pushing (no teeth or jumping though), "catch me if you can" with you running away, or how about "find the stick" (hunt for one together and then toss for them to chew). Don't play chasing games where you are the chaser. This is fun, but reinforces the dog for running away from you.
- **Release to a smell.** Once they get to you, instruct them to "go sniff" or say "okay" to release them to sniff and run to a tree to allow some good smelling.
- **Release out to another dog or a person that they know.** This one is harder because the distraction is hard. Use your leash to enforce the choice of "you" and release for a small effort.
- **Praise and pats.** Normally the reward humans want to use the most; this is low on most dogs' priority list. Not everyone wants a massage when they are playing sports at the park! If your dog retracts from you patting them at the park, don't use this as a reward.



There is no one timeline that will work for every dog. There are very excitable dogs and very calm dogs; dogs that like treats and don't like treats. Some dogs are distracted by any and everything and some dogs really like their people and are super attached to them. Each dog and owner team will make their own timeline depending on doggie personality traits, motivations, timing on the part of the trainer (you!), and time spent practicing. Dogs that have a history of dog or human aggression may never be safe to let off leash (you are not alone!).

Happy Recall Training!

