



TEACHING YOUR DOG TO COME EVERY TIME.

Why train recall?

The most important behavior you can teach your dog is to come when called. Coming when called is a life saving behavior that should never be taken lightly, and should always be reinforced with praise and/or a food reinforcer. In this article I am going to teach you how to train your dog to do an emergency recall. This type of recall is used when the dog MUST come immediately when you call him. It is used in emergency situations, such as when your dog is about to run into the street with a car approaching, or other life and death situations.

Before I start to explain the emergency recall, let me explain why most dogs don't come in the first place. Most of my clients tell me their dogs used to come when called. But now, for some reason, have stopped completely or selectively come when called. Most often this is because we use the "come" to have the dog do something he doesn't want to do. We ask our dogs to "come" inside while they are playing in the yard. We ask our dogs to "come" for a bath. We ask them to "come" when sniffing that dead worm. The "come" cue has now been equated with something bad happening.

This would be like someone yelling "Skunk"! You've equated the word skunk in your mind to something bad. So you run the other way.

So let's get started. First you will want to find a reinforcer that your dog loves. My dogs will work for just about any food treat, but I bring out the big guns for practicing the emergency recall. Yes, this means a trip to the grocery store for roast beef, grilled chicken pieces, or even steak. Cut your treats into small pieces, you will be using a lot of treats to do this type of training, so you do not want to be stingy.

Next, you will pick a word you will use to call your dog for the emergency recall. My cue word is "here", one of my trainer friends uses "now" a student of mine uses the word "yippee". Pick any cue word you would like, just make sure it is a word you can say quickly, and loud enough for the dog to hear from a distance. Avoid the word "come" especially if your dog is currently ignoring the word.

You are now ready to teach your dog to come to your emergency recall cue word. Start inside your house. Wait until your dog is walking towards you, say your cue word in a happy voice, and when your dog comes to you, start treating him. Continue treating for 30 seconds. You are conditioning your dog that the cue word means good things are going to happen, in this case, yummy treats.

You will repeat this exercise 3 times a day, every day.





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Only call your dog using the "emergency recall" cue word when you are 100% positive she is going to come to you. This cue word should not be used for a casual come.

Start building some distance between you and your dog when you call her.

Next, try calling her from another room. Continue to practice calling your dog from various locations in your home. Do not take this exercise outside until you have it perfected inside your house.

When you move this exercise outside you should reduce the distance between you and your dog. You want to set your dog up to succeed. As you increase the difficulty of the behavior such as practicing outside with lots of distractions, you will reduce other criteria of the exercise. As the dog is succeeding with the emergency recall outside, you will increase the distance between you and your dog.

Once your dog is reliably coming to your emergency recall cue word, you can reduce the number of times you practice. I still like to practice this exercise at least once a day.

If your dog has trouble with any of the steps of this exercise, go back to where your dog was successful and continue to practice.

Your goal is for your dog to immediately run to you anytime you use the emergency recall cue word.

To recap the emergency recall

- 1) Choose an easy to remember and say cue word. Avoid the word "come".
- 2) Use a treat your dog LOVES. Not just some old stale dog biscuit.
- 3) Until learned, say the cue word only when you know your dog will come to you 100% of the time.
- 4) Practice 3 times a day
- 5) When rewarding the come, treat (or reinforce) your dog with the yummy treats for 30 seconds.

This technique really will save your dog's life. One of my class room students recently shared a success story. While my student was in his front yard with his dog – off leash, the kids across the street came out to play. The dog (one of the doodle breeds) decided to say hello to the kids. "Doodle's" owner could see a car coming down the street and his dog getting ready to cross. The doodle's owner said he fumbled for his cue word for what seemed like an hour, then yelled in the happiest voice he could muster "BACK!" (as in come "back"). Of course Mr. Doodle turned and trotted happily back to his owner. Tail wagging the whole time. Oblivious to what could have happened.

