

Recall Training

Name recognition

This forms the basis of a solid reliable recall and will teach your dog to turn towards you no matter what is going on, and once you have his attention, you can call him to you or ask him to do something else.

Week 1

The first step is to say your dog's name, click and give a treat. The dog needs to be right in front of you. Do this at least 20 times a day for this first week.

You can use his breakfast and tea for this, and you can repeat it in several different rooms. The idea is to strongly condition the dog that when you call his name and he comes to you, then he will get food. The more you can repeat this exercise, the stronger the behaviour will become and the more likely that he will carry out the behaviour automatically regardless of what he was doing. As you feed the treat, touch his collar (this will mean that he sees having his collar touched as something good, rather than something bad i.e. indicating the end of his free running)

Do not progress onto week 2 unless your dog always looks towards you when you call his name.

Week 2

Toss a piece of food on the ground out of the dog's reach and then say the dog's name. Watch the back of the dog's neck. The second the dog starts to swivel toward you, click and reward. If you get eye contact before you click, you are clicking too late.

For the next step, you are going to toss a treat on the floor and call your dog's name as he finishes eating the treat.

1. Toss a treat on the floor.
2. As your dog is involved with the treat, call your dog's name once and wait.
3. The second your dog's head starts to turn toward you (before eye contact), click.
4. Immediately after you click, turn and move away from your dog.
5. Reward your dog when he or she catches up to you.

For the next step, you still toss a treat on the floor pretty far away and call your dog's name as he is moving towards the treat. Repeat in several places such as your living room, kitchen or garden. Do not do it in any more distracting areas, such as the park, just yet. With a small dog you can walk away after calling their name, with a larger dog you may have to run. The aim of the exercise is to get your dog rushing back to you when you say his name. The more you practice this exercise, the more reliable your dog's recall will become.

Week 3

Having taught your dog that coming to you when you call his name is a wonderful thing, we now need to build on this so that he will come to you from any distance and away from any distraction. We now need to work on what we'll term Restraint recalls.

This week at home, enlist the help of a family member/friend to restrain the dog in a number of different places in your home, garden and out on walks (as long as it is safe to have the dog off lead, if you aren't sure, leave the lead trailing). To start off with, the second person is to gently restrain the dog and talk calmly to him whilst you then call his name. Do this in a quiet area to begin with. Repeat, but this time have your helper interact a little more with the dog and then call him. The idea is that your dog will learn to respond to his name no matter what the distraction (even if the person has food or toys, or even if your dog is playing with another dog!).

Repeat in several different locations but ensure that you and your helper are a fair distance from other distractions (dogs, birds, squirrels, people etc.) as they may end up being too interesting and your dog will fail to respond. We need to set him up for success in these early stages so that he never realises that failure is possible.

If you don't have a helper, then use a long line attached to a harness (not your dog's collar) and then slip the long line round a post so that it goes from your dog round the post and back to your hand. Start close to the dog (you'll need to shorten the line) and call your dog (letting the line out as he comes towards you).

As your dog gets better at this exercise, you can increase the distance to half the length of your long line. Take the line round a post as before ensuring that it can't get snagged as it plays out. Repeat the previous step, but this time, drop the line and turn and run away from your dog and keep running until your dog catches up with you. Give plenty of rewards when the dog reaches you. The first few times you try this, ensure that you are in a quiet secure area. This can be done with a helper holding the long line and dropping it as soon as you call the dog

Week 4

1. Repeat week 3 exercises in a slightly more distracting environment, ensuring that you start off at a distance from the distractions; far enough away so that your dog hardly notices the distraction is there.
2. Repeat 3 times at this distance, and then move two paces closer to the distraction.
3. Move 2 steps closer and repeat step 2.
4. Move another 2 steps closer and repeat step
5. Continue moving closer in increments of 2 steps until you are calling your dog from very close to the distraction.

If at any point the dog fails to come when called, then move back several steps and remain at this distance for longer before moving closer. If your dog fails to recall, go and fetch him and gently guide him back to you. Do not tell him off and do not reward him.

Week 5

Repeat the week 4 exercises but with a shorter line on the dog and using a helper to restrain your dog.

Week 6

Repeat week 5 but with an even shorter line on the dog (just a clip with around 6 inches of lead attached).

Week 7

Repeat week 6 but now we are going to mix up the rewards that the dog gets. The fastest recalls will get the best rewards. If the dog responds immediately you call its name, then it get the excellent stuff. Slow recalls or slow responses to their name will get verbal praise instead of food or a game.

Week 8

This is basically the same as week 7, but this time you are going to wait until the dog get a quarter of the way towards you before you turn and run away, rewarding when you dog gets to you.

Week 9

As week 8 but this time you'll wait until your dog gets halfway back to you before you turn and run away. Remember to reward when the dog gets back to you.

Week 10

As week 9, but this time you'll wait until the dog gets three quarters of the way back to you before you turn and run away. Remember to reward when the dog gets back to you.

Week 11

As week 10, but this time instead of turning and running away, you'll just turn away when your dog gets three quarters of the way back to you. Reward when he reaches your side.

Week 12

As week 11, but this time you'll wait until your dog is only a pace or two away before you turn away and reward.

Week 13

As week 12, but this time you'll only turn slightly away from your dog as they reach you.