

## Teaching Your Dog to Come to You

**Teaching your dog to "Come" is one of the most important lessons she will ever learn.** The sooner you begin teaching "Come" the better chance you have for a lifetime of reliable recalls. But even old dogs can learn new tricks! Older dogs, strays, and shy dogs that do not understand or are fearful of the "Come" command can be reprogrammed for success through time, consistency, and praise.

**It takes time to teach "Come."** Most puppies will "come" to you whenever you decide to walk away because they instinctively follow you. A *reliable* response to "come," however, usually takes months of consistent and positive reinforcement. You want your dog to literally stop in her tracks, turn around on a dime, and happily come running to you whenever the "come" command is given. This is an end result, so do not expect too much of your puppy or dog too soon.

The easiest way to associate your new puppy or dog with the "come" command is to begin using it on their first day home! Yes, even at 8 weeks old, you can begin to use positive reinforcement associated with the "come" command. Whenever your puppy or dog is *already* coming to you (on her own), wait until she is about 2-3 feet from you and then say "(Dog's Name) Come!" in a *very happy* voice. When she gets to you (about 2 seconds later), hug her, clap your hands, and basically make a huge fuss over her. This exercise should be practiced frequently and consistently for 3-5 months (depending on the age and response of your dog). Then it should be practiced periodically for the rest of your dog's life. This is a wonderful exercise because your dog will always perform it perfectly! She will always receive praise because she cannot do it wrong. It is of the utmost importance that your dog *initiates* coming to you on her own, so you need to look for this opportunity, realize it, and then say "Come!" when she's almost at your feet. If she doesn't "come" after you command her to "come"....then you said the command too early. You need to wait until she is almost right on top of you! With this exercise, your dog will learn that "come" is a really good thing. (After a while, you can lengthen the distance from when you start to say COME, but be careful and don't push your luck.)

**One of the biggest mistakes people make when playing with their dog is chasing them.** Rule number one: if you want a reliable recall, NEVER, EVER, chase your dog (unless it is a dire emergency). I know your new puppy may look very cute as she scoots her furry butt around the house while you chase her, but don't. Stop all chasing where *you* are the "chaser." Instead, encourage your puppy or dog to chase *you*! Teach your dog to play "chase" by *you* running around the house (or yard), with your dog chasing you. If your dog will not play, you need to be creative. Get down on your hands and knees and "playbow" to her, crawl away real fast then roll on the ground and let her "catch" you. Make it really happy and fun! Don't use food, use fun. It is important that your dog learns to always "chase" or "follow" you, and at the same time, she's learning to never run away.

**After a few weeks or months**, as your dog begins to enjoy the "come" command, you can start "testing" it as a command. However, you will regress quickly at this point unless you can *back up every "test!"* You can back up your "come" command a few different

ways. One way is to periodically put a harness and lead on your dog and let her drag the lead around (under your supervision). Nonchalantly pick up the lead (without your dog noticing), then say "(Dog's Name) COME!" in a happy voice, if she doesn't come on her own, gently tug on the lead to encourage her. If she still doesn't come, pull her to you while saying COME! COME! in a *very happy* voice. When she reaches you (by gentle force or on her own), give her loads of praise. I remind you that your dogs' lead is attached to a *harness*, not a collar. When you physically pull her to you, you are not choking your dog, nor causing any discomfort. The harness allows you to pull her at her center of gravity and induces "force" in the least "forceful" manner possible. Many people train dogs to "come" by "popping" a choker collar to get their attention. In my opinion, this is perceived as negative reinforcement for most dogs. I do not believe negative reinforcement establishes the foundation of trust and respect between animal and human that is needed for fool proof recalls.

Another way to back up your "come" command is to have someone else "physically walk" your dog to you when you command her to COME. This is accomplished by waiting until your dog is next to another family member (on your dogs' own free will.) Establish communication with the other family member and confirm that they are ready to "back up" your come command. Then say "(Dog's Name) COME!" in a happy voice. If your dog comes to you, praise lavishly, if she hesitates, encourage her by getting on your knees, clap your hands, etc. If she does not come on her own the other family member (who the dog is right next to) gently but firmly wraps their arms around the dogs' mid-section and lifts gently, pushing gently forward, thus "physically walking" your dog to you. Again, this method accomplishes the goal by moving your dog via your dogs' center of gravity, not by tugging, pulling, or pushing. The same thing can be accomplished if your dog is already wearing a harness. If she already has a harness on, simply grasp the harness at its top center and "help" her along! I have used this method with shy, fearful, stray dogs. I put a harness on them for most of the day and it gives me the opportunity to reinforce a *positive* come command throughout the day!

**Now that you are familiar with the exercises, you must practice them frequently and consistently. Remember:**

- 1. NEVER, ever chase your dog!**
- 2. NEVER, ever scold your dog when she comes to you.**
- 3. For the first months of practice, and until your dog comes to you *reliably*, NEVER command your dog to COME unless you have the lead in your hand to back up your command (or someone else has their hands on the dog to back up your command.)**
- 4. If you need your dog for something and you don't have the lead in your hand, go and get your dog. Don't test the COME command when you are unsure of her response.**

**5. Never call your dog using the "come" command, and then ignore her refusal. Always back up your command! Go and get your dog. As you approach your dog tell her "STAY!" until you reach her. Then walk her back to the spot you originated from repeating "COME! COME!" When you get to the spot, praise her for coming. You must show her that she should have "COME" in the first place. After all, it's a really good thing!**

**Do these things for about 3-5 months.** During this time, your dog will learn that the COME command is a wonderful thing! She never does it wrong! She always gets praised! After your dog repeatedly and thoroughly demonstrates that she understands the "come" command, you can start slowly testing your dog. When you test your dog, never tell her to come if you think she won't, always go and get her instead. Remember, make it easy for her to do good. The only time to tell her to come when you are unsure of her response is in an emergency. Otherwise, go and get your dog.

If you have a dog that does not respond well to the "come" command due to negative reinforcement in the past, change the command to "Here!" or anything else that you can say in a happy voice with one syllable. Start doing the exercises mentioned in this article using the new command and you will begin to build respect, trust, and a reliable recall in your dog.

*Source: [www.doggiedoor.com](http://www.doggiedoor.com)*