

## The Recall Game

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The recall game can have your pup coming when called within a few minutes, getting tired out (always a plus!) and learning that coming to you is a good thing! This particular exercise, in my mind, is one of the most important you will ever teach your dog.

The whole family can play this game at once, making it perfect for teaching children better ways to interact with the dog. The dog, in turn, learns to view the children as leaders in the household.

### Step A

One person holds the dog by the collar, and the other person goes 10 to 15 feet away. The dog does not have to sit and stay. In fact, the less you require, the faster the game goes and the more fun it becomes for the dog.

Hint: At first, is it best to start out in a more relaxed position, such as kneeling or sitting with legs crossed. However, make sure you help the dog generalize by practicing the game in a standing position once the dog is playing well.

### Step B

The person calling first, says the dog's name and then "Come". As soon as the dog starts to come, praise the dog.

### Step C

As the dog arrives, take hold of the collar and feed the treat. Resist the urge to reach out for the dog and grab. Hint: Grabbing at, or bending over the dog encourages the dog to stop too far away and possibly play keep away games.

### Step D

When the dog has eaten the treat, the other person then calls the dog and repeats steps B and C. Go back and forth that way for a few minutes.

### **Frequently Asked Questions About the Recall Game:**

*Where should I play this game?* Always play the game with the dog on a long line, in the house, or in a fenced area. This will insure that the dog cannot run too far, should he decide not to come when he is called.

*What if my dog won't come to me when I call?* If the dog does not respond to a call, then do something to help. Go toward the dog, showing the treat and then running backward and encouraging the dog to come with you back to where you were when you first called. Make sure you move all the way back to the place you first called before you give the treat. Never call if you are not ready to follow through, for this teaches the dog that the leadership is inconsistent.

*Why doesn't my dog want to come to me?* There are a few reasons for this happening. Many people often don't realize that they have taught their dog NOT to come to them. They achieve

this by continually applying negative reinforcements when they call the dog. A dog may view many circumstances as negative. Consider the negativity surrounding being called and then given medicine, or being sprayed for fleas. Always remember that the dog pairs together being called with what happens when he arrives. Hence, even if you call the dog in from play, the association the dog will make is negative.

Another reason dogs may not respond to this command is because the owner has previously chased the dog. Many dogs find this to be a lot of fun! Therefore, they quickly learn to move away in order to entice the owner to follow. Turn the tables on this dog by turning away from him first and running the other way!

*How long should I play the Recall Game with my dog?* Begin gradually according to your dog's level of energy and age. Young puppies can play for about 5 minutes before they start to lose interest. Build the dog's interest and stamina as it grows older and stronger. An older dog can usually play for about 8 minutes. It is always wise to quit before the dog is exhausted and bored. Why should I use treats and when can I stop? Use 100% food reward for every call the dog responds to for the first couple of weeks of training. This establishes a fast, conditioned response to the command. When the dog is responding on the first call, and obviously understands the game by running quickly between people, then begin to reward more randomly. However, if you completely stop using food reward, you run the risk of extinguishing the behavior. Always use vocal praise and petting to reward, but keep the treats coming too.

*Are there other ways to encourage my dog to come running when he hears me call?* Yes. Make a different game out of it, by having someone hold the dog while you run quickly to a hiding place. Then call the dog excitedly. The person who was holding the dog lets go and runs with the dog toward your hiding place, staying slightly behind the dog just in case he loses interest. As soon as the dog finds you, heap on the praise, take hold of the collar and reward with a treat or his favorite toy.