



# PET BEHAVIOR LIBRARY

## TEACH YOUR DOG TO "COME" WHEN CALLED

Adapted from "Teaching a Reliable Recall" by Pat Miller, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, updated for the Whole Dog Journal August, 2020

### WHY RECALL?

**A solid recall is a valuable behavior for all dogs! In fact, a reliable recall (coming when called) could even save your dog's life someday. Plus, a consistent recall means your dog will be safer if he's off-leash, and that can mean more off-leash freedom for him and more fun for you!**

*A reliable recall could even save your dog's life someday.*

Many people don't realize that the best recalls are not just reliable, but they're also happy and fast as well. **We want our dogs to come when they're called because they want to and they love it**, not because they're afraid of what will happen to them if they don't.

Lucky for us, **happy, fast, and reliable recalls are actually easy and fun to train**. *The most important keys to success are a commitment to regular practice, and keeping things fun and happy.*

**Keep reading to learn how!**



### 1 Start by charging your "Come" cue.

This will be a word that will always mean to your dog: "Absolutely wonderful stuff is about to happen and you better get over here fast or you're going to miss out!" Say "Come!" in a loud, cheerful voice and feed your dog a very high-value treat – chicken, steak, whatever he thinks is totally wonderful. Repeat many times, until your dog's eyes light up when he hears the cue. Remember, he doesn't have to "come" for this part – he's just hanging out with you, eating treats.

### 2 Establish the meaning of the cue.

Now, with your dog walking by your side on leash, say "Come!" loudly, in a cheerful tone of voice, and run away fast. You and your dog are running together in the same direction. Run 10-15 feet. Reward him with a treat when you stop, or even better, a toy – play a quick game of tug or toss a ball for him to catch. If you keep your rewards high-value and unpredictable, your dog will find your recalls irresistible. "I wonder what exciting thing she's going to do next!"

### **3 See how your dog is picking it up after some practice.**

After several days of practicing the previous steps, try this: Wait until your dog is a few feet away from you (still on leash). Say “Come!” (cheerful and loud!) and run away fast. Run 10-15 feet and reward him at the end. Exciting and unpredictable! If your dog stays very close to you, drop a few yummy treats on the ground, walk to the end of the leash, wait until he’s eating the last one, then say “Come!” and run away. Practice this step for a week or more.

### **4 Take it off-leash!**

When your dog consistently runs to you and with you when you say “Come!” and run away, start a little off-leash work in a safely enclosed, low-distraction area such as a hallway in your house or large den. When he’s not right next to you and not deeply engrossed in some highly rewarding activity (such as gnawing on a bone), say “Come” (loud and cheerful) and run away. Remember to reinforce with an exciting, unpredictable toy or several treats when he comes.

### **5 Keep practicing: Try longer distance recalls.**

You can practice longer distance recalls outside with your dog on a long line – a leash that is 20 to 50 feet long (not a retractable leash!). The long line keeps him safe and prevents him from leaving, but do not use it to pull him to you. Remember to turn and run away fast – at least at first. If he’s now flying to you happily every time, you can face him to greet him and reward him when he gets to you.

### **6 Keep practicing: Try longer distance, off-leash recalls.**

When he reliably comes to you on the long-line in a safely enclosed location, start working on off-leash recalls – still in your safely enclosed location. Repeat the two previous steps. Take care not to call him if he’s involved in some highly rewarding activity such as eating deer poop in the garden. Always call him in a loud, cheerful tone, and use a high-value (and unpredictable) reward when he comes.

## **CHALLENGE ACCEPTED**

**Once your dog can consistently comply with a recall cue in the enclosed location and without a leash, you can take his skills to the next level by adding an automatic sit (to “park” him when he gets to you,) and by providing more, and more challenging, distractions.**



As always, if you need help teaching this important signal to your dog, contact one of our Force-Free Network Trainers (listed in the Behavior section of our website at [spcawake.org](http://spcawake.org)) or call the Adoption Center at 919-772-2326 for additional advice.