

Teaching a Reliable Recall

Why teach a Reliable Recall? *Recall* refers to your dog's ability to come when called. Reliable Recall keeps you and your dog safe. You want to know that your dog will return to you - even in those risky, unplanned moments of taking off after something. By following the rules below, you and your dog can build a reliable recall that will last a lifetime.



The 5 Rules for Reliable Recall

Rule 1. Choose a special word.

It's important to have a special word for recall that won't be used by accident, one that you promise to use only when necessary. Use a distinct sound or a word that is three syllables or less that you are comfortable shouting in public but don't say in regular conversation.

Rule 2. Always reward your dog for recalling.

When you use your Reliable Recall cue, be prepared to reward your dog with something they absolutely love. It's a good idea to keep something extra special just for recall practice. Some examples of very high-value foods are hot dogs, cheese, steak, or cheeseburgers.

Rule 3. Never punish your dog when they come to you.

No matter how long it might have taken them to come back to you, or how naughty they were behaving prior to coming back, you should never punish your dog when they come to you. Your dog won't connect the punishment to the naughty behavior, but they will connect it to coming back to you.

Rule 4. Teach your dog to sit when they arrive at your feet.

Recall is less valuable if it only results in a drive-by from your dog! Teach your dog to sit on their return. Alternatively, you can also practice physically getting a hold of your dog prior to delivering the reward. Either option gives you time to gather your dog or leash them up when you need to.

Rule 5. You're always working on recall.

Recall is not about how the dog is rewarded in the moment, but about how the dog has been rewarded in the past! Don't expect your dog to come when called if you are not regularly practicing and rewarding it. The more you use your recall cue, according to the 5 Rules, the more reliable it becomes. Remember to train in a variety of locations and over varying distances.

How to Teach Reliable Recall

Your goal is to teach your dog that returning to you is always the better bet! Do this by making recall games fun for your dog.

Moonwalk Recall

Step 1. Give your recall cue in a clear, cheerful tone.

Step 2. Walk backwards excitedly, 1-2 steps. Make it enticing for your puppy to follow!

Step 3. When your puppy gets to you, gently take their collar or harness in your hand.

Step 4. Click, then treat!

Step 5. Repeat these steps, walking a little further with each repetition.

Training tip: This game can be played on leash or off leash in a safe space.

Treat to Trot

Step 1. Place 3-4 pieces of low-value food (like your puppy's kibble) on the ground.

Step 2. Calmly walk away a few steps while your puppy eats the food.

Step 3. As soon as your puppy finishes eating, give your recall cue in a clear, cheerful tone.

Step 4. When your puppy comes to you, gently take their collar or harness in your hand.

Step 5. Click, then treat!

Step 6. Repeat these steps, walking a little further away with each repetition.

Training tip: Give yourself more time to get further away by scattering the low-value food.

Puppy Ping-Pong

Step 1. Enlist the help of a friend. Prepare treats for both of you to keep in your treat pouch.

Step 2. Stand 6 feet from the other person, and gently hold your puppy's collar or harness.

Step 3. Ask the other person to call your puppy, using your recall cue. Then let your puppy go.

Step 4. When your puppy arrives, have the other person gently take a hold of their collar or harness, then click, then offer a treat.

Step 5. This time, call your puppy back to you. When your puppy arrives, gently grab their collar or harness, then click, then offer a treat.

Step 6. Repeat these steps 5-10x time. Thereafter, vary the distance your puppy must travel.

Training tip: Advance this by adding more people to the game. Vary who calls, but be sure that only one person calls your puppy at a time.

Pro Tip

Give your recall cue once. Avoid repeating the cue, or your puppy will not learn it reliably.