



Teaching Your Dog to Come

by Playing Hide and Seek

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Of all the things your dog learns, learning to come when called, the first time, every time, is one of the most important for the comfort and safety of you, your dog, and those around you. With a good, reliable recall, you can allow your dog to be off-leash at appropriate places. You can stop your dog from doing inappropriate things with a simple, cheery “Come!” Your community will thank you.

Start in a familiar environment with little or no distraction. The behavior is more likely to occur when the dog has less to see and think about.

1. Start in the same room with your dog on a leash. Face your dog. Say, “Come!” in a cheery voice while backing away 5 or 6 steps. Clap your hands and chat happily to keep your dog’s attention on you. Immediately offer a food reward as soon as your dog arrives. Repeat 3 to 4 times several times a day. **DO NOT** put your dog on a stay before calling and do not ask for a sit when your dog arrives. This is the shaping stage and it’s not time to drill your dog. This should be a game your dog always wins by coming right away.
2. After a day or two of calling your dog on the leash, start to vary the distance and make calling more spontaneous. Always be prepared with a treat. Begin calling your dog off leash in the same way.
3. When you see that your dog consistently comes, off leash, when you are in the same room, go further away, or even out of sight, and call your dog. Always be prepared for with a treat or toy and don’t put your dog on a stay.
4. Start to play hide and seek with your dog. When you are in other rooms of your house, hide but make yourself easy to find and follow the same process as in step 1. You can increase the difficulty in very small steps but always be willing to go back to the step before if you experience failure.

That’s all for the first stage of teaching “come.” Avoid using your dog’s name or the word “come” when you are calling your dog outdoors, in a distracting environment, or when you do not have a leash on him or her.

When this stage is reliable at a moderately-high level of difficulty, you can start going outside with your dog on a twenty-to-thirty-foot long line. It’s easy to hide when your dog is not paying attention to you and he or she will have a great time finding you and getting rewarded with a food treat or a favorite game. Hide and Seek may become your dog’s favorite game!