

Not Coming When Called

Do you find yourself calling your dog's name, only to have her look at you and take off in the other direction? You are not alone. But with some work and patience, you can get your dog to come to you *the first time, every time!*

Common mistakes

Humans often inadvertently train their dogs to run away when they are called. People typically call their dogs by yelling phrases like these:

Fido, come here. Look at this shoe, you bad boy!

Come here, Princess. Let's go to the vet.

Buddy, come. Stop playing with the other dogs, we need to go home.

Come on, Shadow. No more sniffing in the yard. I have to go to work.

For dogs, "come" often means "stop having fun" or "you are in trouble." It's no wonder they don't want to come when called!

Key behavior points

- If you have used the word "come" when you've been mad, your dog may have learned to dislike that word. Try a new word such as "here" so you and your dog can start fresh.
- Never punish a dog for coming to you, even if it takes him forever to do it. For example, don't be annoyed with your dog because you're late for work and it took him 20 minutes to come. If you're short or angry, it may take 45 minutes next time. Instead, praise your dog and perhaps he will come sooner next time.
- Don't set up your dog to fail. If you have never taught your dog to come, don't let him loose in a field and expect him to do it naturally. That's just not fair. Set up small, controlled situations that become increasingly more challenging as you progress with your training. Also, if your dog runs away every morning, do not let him off leash until he is trained.
- Don't overuse the word. By repeating "Come! Come here! Come on! Come, come, come, come," you teach your dog that "come" is just part of a bunch of gibberish.
- Instead of making "come" mean "end of fun," make it mean the opposite! Every time your dog comes to you, you must make it a pleasant experience. Pet or praise your dog or give him a treat every single time he comes. Set up scenarios where your dog plays, you call, he comes, you reward, and he goes back to playing. Repeat the scenarios many times.

Steps to teaching your dog to come

Take the following steps -- remain on each step until you have a great deal of success. Only then should you move on to the next step. Be sure to always have your dog's favorite toy or some tasty treats on hand for the reward. Find a special treat that your dog only gets when he comes to you.

1. Begin in the house, in the same room, just a few feet away as your dog. Call him to you ("Rufus, come"). When he comes, praise, pet and give him a treat. Then walk away as if nothing happened. When the dog stops following you around, repeat the process until he comes easily, every time he's called. Then move to step 2.
2. Repeat. This time call your dog from the other side of the same room.
3. Repeat. This time go to another room, just out of sight from the dog, and call.
4. Repeat. This time go to a spot several rooms away, or onto another floor, and call.
5. Repeat. This time move to another room, close the door but leave it slightly ajar.
6. Move outside to a securely fenced area or use a long tether to keep your dog safe. Walk around while the dog does his own thing. At random times call the dog to you. When he comes, reward him. Then walk away as if nothing happened. When the dog stops following you, repeat.
7. Gradually give the dog more freedom and more space. Ultimately, incorporate distractions to test the dog.