



Recall - Phase 1 Beginners - Teaching your Puppy Recall

Introduction

One of the core skills our puppies need to learn is to come to us when we call them. This is known as “recall” and at PAWS we ask for the behavior with the verbal cue “Come!” A reliable recall is important as it enables us to call our puppies back to us at any time away from distractions or potential danger. It’s also important for their future lives as Assistance Dogs so their client can call their dog to them at any time to perform a task.

How to Begin Recall with Your Puppy

When we ask our puppies to come to us, we are asking them to stop what they are doing and turn away from other distractions. Part of building a reliable recall with your puppy is teaching them that being with you is a positive thing and the most exciting place to be.

Before you start working on recall with your puppy, they need to have good name response. If you need to refresh this skill, here are some resources to help:

[Article - Name Response](#)

[Video - Name & Treat](#)

Phase 1 - Beginners - Starting Recall

- ☐ Stage 1 - Have your puppy on leash in a low distraction environment indoors. Put a few pieces of kibble on the floor for your puppy. While they are busy with the kibble, call their name. As soon as they look up, start to back away so they move towards you, and as soon as they start moving towards you, mark with an enthusiastic “Yes!” You will need to make your body language and voice exciting so they want to come to you, but to begin with, you can use very light leash pressure to encourage them to move towards you. Move back for a few steps, stop and when they reach you, mark with

another “Yes,” give them a treat, and have a party! Repeat a few times and once your puppy is looking up when you call their name and happily moving towards you 4 out of 5 times in a training session, you can move onto the next stage.

- ☐ Stage 2 - Now we are going to add a verbal cue. Set everything up as in Stage 1, but now say your puppy’s name and then “Come!” immediately afterwards. Again, as they start to move towards you as you back away, mark with an enthusiastic “Yes!” and then mark and reward again when they reach you. Repeat this until they are successful 4 out of 5 times each time you train and then repeat in three different rooms of your house.
- ☐ Stage 3 - Now we are going to move on from putting food on the floor. Still have your puppy on leash (a slightly longer one or a longline might be helpful for this exercise) but this time toss a piece of kibble away from you. When your puppy is busy with the kibble, say their name and “Come!” As before, as they start to move towards you as you back away, mark with an enthusiastic “Yes!” and then mark and reward again when they reach you. Once your puppy comes to you at least four out of five times each time you practice this exercise, you can move onto the next stage.
- ☐ Stage 4 - For this stage you will need a longer leash, or a longline. You are going to repeat Stage 3 but gradually increase the distance you throw the kibble away from you. Increase the distance very slowly though! You can also practice this in different rooms of your home.

Setting Up for Success

- 🐾 The key to building a strong recall with your puppy is to always make coming to you a positive experience. If at any stage they are not successful, remain calm and set your expectations lower!
- 🐾 Always be the most exciting thing in whatever environment you are working in. If you are working outside or in other high distraction environments, this might mean being somewhat squeaky and animated! Try not to worry about what your neighbors might think!
- 🐾 Keep training sessions short and sweet and always end in success.
- 🐾 Always start working on recall in a low distraction environment and begin with short distances.
- 🐾 Make small changes in variables such as distance and distractions to aid proofing of your puppy’s recall behavior.

- 🐾 Try to move through the stages slowly as that will help to build a more reliable recall in the long run.
- 🐾 If the behavior is starting to break down at any stage, go back a few stages until it is reliable again.
- 🐾 We do not want to “poison” the “Come” cue so try to avoid nagging. Use the verbal cue just once and try and avoid “Come, come, come, come...” as repeated cues with no reaction from your puppy quickly teaches them that the cue has no meaning.
- 🐾 Keep practicing! Once your puppy has a reliable recall, don’t “tick the box” and move on. Keep practicing which will help proof, generalize, and maintain the behavior!
- 🐾 Once you have worked through all the stages of Phase 1 and your puppy is being successful the majority of the time in your training sessions, you can move on to Phase 2 – Improvers.

Article – Recall – Improvers – Adding “Wait,” Distractions, and More Distance