

Really Reliable Recalls

Recalls take a lot of work to build and maintain. Even if your dog has a great recall, don't take it for granted – always make sure your dog knows she's the greatest for coming back when asked.

In the early days, don't let your dog run loose off-lead in an interesting place, especially where there is lots of room. This is just asking for your dog to ignore your pleas to come back and so learn that she can pick and choose when to respond. It's far better to exercise an untrained dog or pup on a long line or flexi-lead so you can practice the following exercises without her choosing something better to do.

Recall Games

Use a combination of the following to keep things interesting:

Puppy Recalls

Play this game with two people. In the early stages have one person hold your dog, while the other shows her that they have a treat or favourite toy, and then moves a short distance away before calling her. Then swap. End the game while she still wants more. When your dog has the idea, don't show her the reward (keep her guessing what it will be) and then start to increase the distance. Turn it into hide'n'seek if you like.

Funder

Call your dog, and as she comes running, throw a treat a short distance through your legs behind you. You want her to run between your legs after the food. As soon as she does, spin around to face her and when she looks at you, throw another piece of food through your legs behind you for her to chase after. As she gets familiar with this game, throw the food further and further away to increase the distance she is running. Switch to toys for added excitement.

Cold Call

Call your dog when she is not expecting it. Reward BIG when she responds to this! Only call when she is not particularly distracted by something else, though, so you are not competing for her attention.

Catch Me if You Can

Run away from your dog. When she starts to come after you, call her and then reward her when she gets to you. For a variation, put a couple of treats on the ground and while your dog is eating them, take off. When she catches up, repeat.

Walking Recall

While on a walk, surprise your dog by calling her and running backwards. Aim for no pressure on the lead while you are moving backwards – don't drag her to you.

Top Tips for a Great Recall:

- Build a great relationship – make sure your dog *wants* to be with you.
- Be consistent – use a specific recall cue every time, so she knows exactly what you are asking.
- Be patient, and realise that a great recall takes years of practice, maturity, and experience.
- Practice all the time, for the rest of the dog's life.
- Reward big time, every time, for the rest of the dog's life. You have to be more rewarding than everything else!
- Never punish or scold when your dog comes to you, no matter what happened before she arrived. Always be your dog's safe space and happy place so she can always come to you confidently.
- Don't call unless you know your dog is going to respond quickly. Get her attention first. Don't repeat yourself – you will just teach her to tune you out.
- Don't call if coming to you will result in bad things for dogs. Make sure really good stuff happens first.
- Be proactive and vigilant, and manage situations so that you never lose control.
- Take her to lots of interesting places and make sure she gets lots of exercise and mental stimulation. Dogs often fail to come when called because they are so frustrated by boredom and restriction.