

## Teach your dog to come! Training Sessions at the Off Leash Dog Park

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“He won’t come when I call him!” It is one of the biggest complaints we trainers hear from clients, but it doesn’t have to be!

Do you take your dog to the off leash park for exercise and socialization? If so, you have a fantastic opportunity to teach your dog to come when you call her.

There is one golden rule that you must keep in mind if you want a reliable recall. You need to teach your dog that come means the following: **Run to owner, get a cookie, and go on with your own bad self.** Dogs understand consequences, and they learn to avoid unpleasant consequences very quickly. If you keep this fact in mind, you will be well on the road to understanding how to motivate your dog to come to you when you call her.

Here are four basic rules for teaching a reliable recall.

**Rule #1 Never call your dog to come if you plan on doing something to her that she will not enjoy.** For example, don’t call her and then give her a bath, trim her nails, put her in her crate. You get the picture. What should you do when it’s bath time? Just go and get her. If you need to bring a treat with you so that she is inclined to approach you that’s just fine. When she is near enough put the leash on her and take her to the tub.

Along the same lines, if you walk out to your back yard and see your dog digging up your coveted perennial garden, don’t call her to come and then punish her. If you do, she will learn that coming to you is not safe. However, no lesson will be learned about digging up the garden.

**Rule # 2 Never call your dog to you if it means ending play.** If your dog is in your fenced back yard, and is sniffing the tall grass, and you want her to come in for the evening don’t call her. Instead, put your shoes on, grab a treat, and go outside and just get her and bring her inside.

**Rule # 3 ALWAYS reward your dog when she comes to you when you call her; then let her go back to what she was doing.** A reward does not have to be edible! You can give her verbal praise, a belly rub, or throw the ball for her. This just reinforces to her that “come” means all good and no bad.

**Rule # 4 Don’t call your dog if you know that there is not a snowballs chance in hell that she will come to you!** Start the process of teaching come to your dog in a low distraction environment. This might be inside your home, or on your driveway. If you know that your dog

always comes when you call her from the kitchen, then start there! Don't take the show on the road (outside) until your dog is coming to you inside about 90% of the time.

So what the heck does all this have to do with the off leash park? It's simple! There is no better place to reinforce what "come" means to your dog than the off leash park. Once your dog has a basic understanding of what come means, it is time to practice at the park.

Next time you go to the park take about 10 extremely good food treats with you and hide them in your pocket. Let your dog off leash to play. Eventually, she will get tired, and there will be a lull in her playing. Maybe she has stopped to get a drink and she is just standing there panting. Your job is to get within five feet of her, hold out your hand with a treat, and call her to come. If your timing is good, and you are close enough, and the food is motivating enough, she will come to you. Give her the treat and tell her to "Go play" again.

The goal is to set your dog up for success. This means not calling her when she is in raucous play with another dog. That would constitute a Ph.D. recall, and you are only an undergraduate right now! Catch her when she is close to you and tired before you call her. Don't be disappointed if he doesn't come the first time. Next time get closer and make sure there are no other dogs ready to play bow her. Another tactic to try is to run away from her after you call her if she doesn't come to you. Dogs love chasing rapidly retreating objects! Try and get ten quality recalls in each time you go to the park. As your dog gets more and more reliable, you can slowly try calling her with slightly more distractions around her. The key is to proceed slowly.

Remember, when it is time to leave the park, don't call your dog! Take that last treat that you have, and offer it to your dog. Clip on the leash while she is eating it and then leave the park.