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## Your Smart Dog

### Come Here! Part Two: How To Teach It

March 2007

Last month's newsletter talked about the ways we, sometimes unknowingly, teach our dogs *not* to come to us when we call them. Hopefully you've incorporated last month's tips into your daily routine and you're already noticing a difference. This month, **we're going one step further and teaching (or re-teaching) your dog to come when called.** I'll cover the specific steps involved in teaching the recall and even tell you some fun games you can use to help teach your dog this important, life-saving behavior.

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#### Make it Easy

The first thing to remember when teaching your dog to come when called is to make it really easy for your dog to get it right. Start indoors, where distractions are minimal – the less distractions, the easier it is for your dog to get it right. **The more often your dog gets it right, the more often he's rewarded. The more he's rewarded, the more often he'll come to you in the future.**

#### Tools You'll Need

##### Voice

There are a couple of things you can use to help your dog learn to come running when you call. And all of them, with one exception, you have with you all the time, every day. The first is your voice. Be happy! If you yell at your dog to "COME!" in a stern and serious voice, you don't sound so welcoming. Heck, if you called a *person* in that stern voice, do you think they'd enjoy coming to you?! Probably not, so remember – make it easy for your dog to want to come to you – sound pleasant, fun, welcoming. Higher pitched, staccato sounds naturally catch the attention of dogs – use that to your advantage!

##### Body

Your body language *by itself* can either repel or draw a dog toward you. Bending down

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at the knees (not bending over at the waist, which can actually keep a dog away) is helpful to get a dog to come close to you. Holding your hand out is also another helpful gesture to draw your dog in toward you.

##### Rewards

Here is the one thing you might not have on you naturally. When your dog comes to you, it's your responsibility to reward him for his correct behavior. Your dog chooses his reward – he's the only one who can decide whether or



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not something is rewarding. If your dog **loves chasing the tennis ball**, carry a tennis ball with you. If he comes running to you when you call him, reward him by tossing the ball! If he **loves getting a scratch-scratch**, give him a mini-massage when he comes running. If your dog's world **revolves around food**, carry some extra tasty treats and give him some when he comes to you. Here's the most important point: the reward for coming to you *must be better than whatever the dog is leaving.*

### Step By Step

Now that we have all the tools in place, let's get right down to it! Here are the specific steps you'll need to teach your dog to come running when you call him. Remember, start this training indoors, where distractions are minimal.

**Step 1** – Hold a tasty treat between your index finger and thumb. Put that treat right in front of your dog's nose.

**Step 2** – *Happily* call your dog's name and say the word "Come," as you take three or four *quick* steps backward.

**Step 3** – As your dog is coming toward you, pull that treat in between your knees and click as the dog is coming toward you.

**Step 4** – Release the treat to the dog as his nose reaches your hand (which is between your knees).

We want the dog to come in very close, which is why you pull the treat in between your knees. If your dog comes in that close, it's very easy to reach down and grab his collar if you needed to hold onto him.

As your dog gets better at this (which shouldn't take too long, this is designed to be easy), gradually increase the distance your dog needs

to come to you. Use a partner to hold the dog so you can get farther away.

Another way to ramp up difficulty is to put something interesting between you and the dog, so that he must go past it to get to you. Again, it's very helpful to have a partner (or two) – one to hold the dog, the other to stand at the interesting object (to make sure your dog doesn't stop and investigate). Remember, the more difficult the task, the better the reward needs to be.

### Games People and Dogs Play

Training doesn't have to be boring and tedious, liven up learning with some games that teach your dog that coming when called is fun!

#### Round Robin

Give three or more people a handful of your dog's most favorite treats. Stand at opposite corners of the room. Take turns calling the dog (each person using the same format "Dog's Name: Come!") in a happy and chipper voice and rewarding lavishly each time the dog comes. If the dog makes a mistake and visits someone who didn't call, that person should fold their arms and look at the ceiling, signaling to the dog that an incorrect choice was made, and to try again.

#### Flights of Fancy

This next game needs only two people. Position each person (loaded with tasty treats, of course) at either end of the staircase. Take turns calling the dog up and down the steps, rewarding with a tasty treat each time. (This has an added bonus of exercising your dog as well!)

### Final Note

A last word of caution: until your dog's recalls are rock-solid, do not give him the opportunity to make any mistakes. What this means is don't let your dog run loose if you're not 98% sure he'll come when you call. If he gets rewarded



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for *not coming* when called (i.e. he gets to greet your neighbor when he runs off), you're actually making it harder to teach the dog to come when called. You're better off not even calling your dog, than using that sacred recall word when you know he's not going to come.

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