



Come when Called Games

Come when Called is one of the most important and most desired of all the cues we teach our dogs. It is also one of the hardest behaviors to make reliable in the face of Distraction. Simply put, you must be more reinforcing than the environment so that your dog wants to come to you. An effective way to build a solid recall is make coming to you, fun.

Incorporating play into your training not only encourages a stronger bond with your dog, it also makes the training and the behavior more enjoyable for both of you. The following are some exercises you can practice with your dog to make Come when Called rewarding.

Hide and Seek

To play Hide and Seek, simply toss a few kibbles or low-value treats toward the opposite direction of your hiding spot, then run and hide while your dog is hunting down the treats. After giving your dog adequate time to eat the treats, call their name in your best sing-song voice with all the excitement you can muster- whistling, kissing noises, clapping hands. When your dog comes, reward him profusely! Practice with simple hiding places initially to set your dog up for success.

Strike It Rich

This is a fun one to play with your dog on or off leash outside (safety permitting). A problem we have with outdoor recalls is that there is often far more value in the environment than there is in you. This activity helps to make you more valuable to your dog and requires some preplanning. You will need to hide treats in random places along your path.

Once you have prepared your hiding places, take your dog for a walk. Allow your dog to sniff and become distracted as you approach the spots. Once he is looking elsewhere, call his name with excitement and enthusiasm!

When your dog looks at you, move as fast as you can to your stash! There is nothing quite as exciting to your dog as a footrace with their human. When your dog gets to you, point out the hidden treats, excitedly praising him for following your lead. Your dog will very quickly learn that you are spot-on with your concept of things worth getting

Go Get It/Come back

If you are practicing Come when Called alone, use the Go Get It/Come Back method. Toss a lower value treat away from you. Make sure the dog sees the toss (an underhand toss works best). Cue the dog to Take It. As soon as the dog finishes the treat, call your dog's name and say Come once, to encourage him to come towards you. When the dog gets to you, treat generously with high value treats. Start with very short distances and toss the treats farther as your dog becomes proficient. This style of practice can also be done on leash while on walks.



Restrained Recalls

This game requires two people. The helper will hold the dog by the leash near his collar while also holding the end of the leash. When you call your dog, they will release the hand holding the leash near his collar but keep a hold of the end of the leash so that the dog is not loose or able to escape. Make sure the leash is long enough that the dog can reach you without reaching the end of the leash.

Your goal is to get your dog excited and ready to run. This can be done by showing the dog a treat and then running/moving quickly away from him. Squatting down and making fun noises, kissing sounds, calling his name, or patting your legs can also be used to generate excitement. When the dog is ready to run to you, say "Come" and have your helper release their grip on the leash by the collar. When your dog gets to you, Reward them with a treat, praise, and petting.

Puppy Ping Pong

This game also requires two or more people and is best played in an enclosed area so that your dog may be off the leash. Excitedly call your dog. When the dog comes Reward them generously, then Release them. Then have another person call your dog. If the dog is hesitant to leave you, cross your arms and ignore your dog. Your dog will figure out that he needs to go to the other people to get Rewarded. Start with short distances and gradually move farther away from your partners.

Regardless of which technique you are using, stop playing before your dog is ready to call it quits. This helps make any of these games more desirable for your dog. The emphasis is on play with these exercises. These activities help increase your value to the dog regardless of what other distractions are present in the environment.