



Pawsitive Experience
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Off Leash Recall

Before starting the off leash recall, it is best for your dog to learn the “restrained recall” which is covered in another training tip available here. Practice the “restrained recall” for at least a month with 90% reliability before working off leash. It is also important for your dog to have good “attention” skills, which -- you guessed it -- is in another training tip found here.

Once you’re ready to train the off leash recall, start your dog on a long line. A long line is a light 20-40 foot long leash. They can be purchased at most pet stores. This long line attaches to a buckle collar on your dog (do not use a training collar or harness).

When you use a long line, allow your dog to drag the line along the ground. Don’t hold on to the other end, but stay near the line as the dog drags it freely behind him. The long line is there to prevent your dog from getting reinforced by anything except you. It is also used as a safety line so your dog can’t get away.

Now let’s assume your dog is on a long line, and you are taking a walk together. If your dog is distracted by something interesting (for example, he sees another dog up ahead), say your dog’s name, and the word “come” (e.g., when I am walking my dog Griffin, I say “Griffin come!”) If you have done your previous homework, and your dog has good attention, and knows how to come using the restrained recall method, your dog will spin around and come to you with excitement and motivation. When he does, reward him with food and praise. If he is more motivated by toys than food, pop out a toy and play tug, or throw it for him.

If your dog still thinks he has a choice and decides not to come, you step on the long line and immediately say “uh-oh” or whatever word you use when your dog does not do something correctly. When your dog hits the end of the line, he will probably look back to see what happened. If he starts to come back to you, praise him for coming back. If you have to step on the line to get him back, I often only use praise, and no food or toy reward.

Your dog will understand that not coming is NOT a good idea; when he gets the uncomfortable feeling of being stopped in his tracks at the end of the line, and he doesn’t get the reinforcement of going to whatever distraction interested him. He’ll think you are magic, since you can stop him from such a distance away. That is what we are striving for -- being a magician in your dog’s eyes.

A few quick notes:

1. You must say the “come” command before you step on the leash, otherwise your dog will only respect the leash not the command.
2. When in training, never allow your dog beyond the length of the line so you can step on it if he doesn't come.
3. Be patient -- this can take months to master. The more your dog is on the long line, the higher the success.
4. **Very important -- put knots in your line about every foot, so when you do step on it, the knots will stop the line from sliding, and you can get better footing.**

Important Rules for a Reliable Recall:

1. Do not call your dog to punishment or something they don't want to do (like a bath!) - just go get them.
2. Always set yourself up for success. Do not call your dog unless you believe he will come. If he is playing with another dog and you don't think he will come, go get him instead.
3. Praise your dog every time they do it right, and reward him with things he loves -- food, toys, throwing a ball, belly rubs, or even better, a combination of these types of rewards.
4. Always smile and tell your dog how much you appreciate that they came to you.
5. When off leash, call your dog frequently, reward them when they come, and then release them and let them go play and have fun, and then a few minutes later, call again. Too many recalls get ruined because dogs think when they are called, it means the fun ends-they get put on a leash or in the car.

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