

Kelly Krager

From: Aidan, Positive Petzine [editor@positivepetzine.com]
Sent: Thursday, October 04, 2007 10:00 AM
To: Kelly Krager
Subject: [positivepetzine] Does Sophie always come when called?

Hi Kelly, teaching Sophie to come when called might be the most useful 'trick' you could ever teach Sophie - and it might also prove to be life-saving!

When your dog slips his leash and dashes off across the highway after a stray cat, you don't want a "take your sweet time" sort of recall, you want a first-time-every-time-turn-on-a-dime sort of recall.

But how do we train this using pet-friendly techniques that anyone can master?

The recall starts off as a game played in a very low distraction environment. This could be your bathroom, or kitchen. There must be nothing for pup to do in that room except pay attention to you. When pup comes over to you, say "good!" and toss a treat a short distance away from you and pup. This sets up the next repetition. You can keep doing this over and over for a few minutes, then end the training session. Do this at least once a day until it becomes hard-wired.

Next, get a helper to play this game with you, calling pup back and forth. You don't need to toss the treat away from you, give pup the treat then have your helper call pup. Do this for a few minutes, as often as you can get help.

The idea with these games played in very low distraction environments with tasty treats is that we're "hard-wiring" our dogs to come when called. This comes through repetition, lots and lots of repetition. But not repetition of sloppy or half-hearted recalls, keep it fun, set your dog up for success, keep sessions short, and begin in low-distraction environments.

When pup has a very good idea of how to play the game, start selectively rewarding only the fastest and snappiest responses. Don't reward if pup took too long to respond, or dawdled over to you.

Some dogs are naturally a bit slow, so you might need to settle for a little less at first. But make sure you weed out the very slowest responses by not rewarding them.

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Introduce distractions gradually. In a perfect world we introduce distractions at a rate where our dogs always succeed and improve. In the real world, distractions crop up despite our best planning and care. For this reason, we should invest in and use a long leash, something around 30' in length. If a rabbit darts across the training ground, our dog can't chase for more than 30'.

Which brings us to the Golden Rule of Coming When Called - NEVER call your dog to come if you are not 80% sure that he will come. So if that rabbit darts across the training ground, relax, let the leash put the brakes on gently, and DON'T CALL YOUR DOG. Wait until the distraction has passed, and your dog has forgotten about it.

Why? It's a huge mistake to let your dog think that coming when called is optional. You will not compete with the distraction (yet), so don't try except in emergencies.

So how do we build up the recall through distractions? Training with things that distract Sophie will be the topic of the next lesson...

Regards,
Aidan
Editor

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