



Reliable Recall

Excerpted from [Click for Joy: Questions and Answers from Clicker Trainers and their Dogs](#) by Melissa Alexander, an unparalleled guide to the concepts of clicker training. Melissa is also the moderator of [ClickerSolutions](#), an online discussion forum.

A recall can save your dog's life. It can stop her from running in front of a car, or from chasing an animal into the woods. It can call your dog away from a tempting but dangerous delicacy she has just discovered.

Getting the behavior

Teaching a recall is easy—just reinforce your dog for coming to you! Start by kneeling a few feet away and making happy noises. Click when the pup takes her first step toward you and give her a yummy treat when she gets to you. Run a few feet away and repeat the process. Make it a fun game! When she's reliably coming to you, start using your cue. Add distance and distractions to the recall just as you would for a sit or other behavior. Calling a young puppy from across the yard when she is exploring a new, interesting scent is setting yourself and your pup up to fail. Walk to within a few feet, kneel down, and call her from there—and make sure to reinforce her for abandoning the distraction with something even better.

Success comes from repetition. Don't increase your distance or distractions until your dog responds immediately and enthusiastically to the recall cue. While you're training, remember to give a super-good reinforcement *every* time you call your dog.

The collar grab

When you call your dog, take hold of her collar before you deliver the reinforcer—and do that every single time. It does you no good to have a recall if you can't then catch your dog, and dogs have been killed because they avoided their owners' hands and

at the last moment bolted into the street. Having someone reach out to grab and restrain you is startling at best. Associate reaching and grabbing with good things by feeding a yummy treat once you have a hand on your pet's collar.

Exercises for excellence

Try these recall games to help teach your pet recalls are fun and rewarding:

- When your dog is several feet away, say her name and give your recall cue. Then begin running backwards away from the dog. Click when she starts toward you and reward her when she catches up. This exercise engages the dog's natural desire to chase.

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- Ask one or more friends or family members to help. Stand eight or ten feet apart, facing each other (or make a circle, if you have more than two people). Have one person call the dog. Click as soon as she starts toward the person, and have the person give a treat. Then have the next person call her. Repeat, gradually increasing the distance between people.
- Practice recalls in your house. Call your dog from across the room, from another room, from upstairs, from downstairs. Have a friend hold your dog (or ask your dog to stay) for a moment, then play hide and seek.

Tips for success

Keep the following tips in mind as you train your recall and incorporate the recall into everyday life:

- *Always* make recalls rewarding.
- Use the highest value rewards you have.
- If you don’t have a reward handy, make a big production of taking your dog to get one. She earned it, and the whole party is a jackpot.
- Practice calling your dog away from something she wants, give her a high-value reward, and then *let her go back to what she was doing*. Practice that a lot.
- Do lots and lots of short-distance recalls. You’ll get more reps and build a habit faster. Grab your dog’s collar before you give the reward every time. Again, a recall is no good if you can’t catch your dog.
- Call your dog one time. If she doesn’t respond, go and get her (except during training, when a non-response is considered an error and dealt with through extinction).
- Don’t call your dog when she isn’t going to respond. Yelling “Missy, come!” over and over as she runs around ignoring you only weakens your cue.
- Practice your recall in distracting situations, increasing the level of distractions gradually.

Finally, *don’t* take recalls for granted. Remember, your dog’s life could depend on the reliability of her response. This means *never, ever punish a recall*:

- Don’t call your dog and then do something she doesn’t like, such as crating or confining her and then leaving her alone.
- If your dog is doing something you don’t want her to do, don’t call her and scold her—or even call her and ignore her. If you call her, reinforce her for coming.
- If your dog is doing something she enjoys, don’t call her away without rewarding her. Balance the times when fun ends with several “practice” recalls after which she is allowed to go back to what she was doing.

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