

# Teaching Your Dog a Reliable Recall

---

## Step 1: Choose Your Reward

Choose a reward that is HIGH value for your dog. Try to find a reward that your dog will easily take in low distracting, unfamiliar environments.

### *Food Rewards*

Choose highly visible rewards so you can play games outside in the grass. Try to choose food rewards that are easy for your dog to consume quickly and do not leave crumbs

#### **Here are some ideas:**

- Cubed turkey breast (Costco oven roasted turkey breast, cut into cubes)
- Cut up chicken breast (Make sure it isn't shredded)
- String Cheese, cubed (in moderation)
- Vital Essentials Freeze Dried Beef Tripe
- Hot Dogs, cut up (in moderation)

### *Toy Rewards*

We prefer toy rewards that are highly interactive and allow your dog to play WITH you.

#### **Here are some ideas:**

- French Linen Tug Toy (for advanced tuggers)
- Starmark foam ball on a rope toy
- Fleece Tug Toy (for younger dogs, or inexperienced tuggers)
- Hol-ee Roller

Choose the reward your dog likes best and remove access to it. Only bring it out when you are working with your dog so that it maintains its value.

---

## Step 2: Choose Your Cues

**To teach your dog a recall you need THREE basic cues:**

1. Your Recall Cue (Examples: “Come” , “Here”, “With Me”)
2. A Marker Cue that tells your dog to get a reward from your hand (Examples: “YES!”, “YIP!” Or “CHIP!” )
3. A Marker Cue that tells your dog to get a reward you’ve tossed (Examples: “Get it”, “Toss”, “Chase”)

Get clear on your cues and stay consistent. And remember, only use your cues when you are prepared to reinforce them!

---

## Step 3: Set Expectations

For this exercise, use moderate value treats, and practice is a familiar, low distraction environment.

1. With your dog in front of you, say “Ready!” and wait for them to check in with you.
2. When they do, say “Get it” and toss a treat away
3. As soon as they finish eating the thrown treat, and turn back towards you (if they don’t immediately turn to you, you can encourage them a bit), say “Get it” again
4. Toss a second treat behind you (you can toss between your legs or off to your side)
5. Repeat 3-5 times twice daily
6. Say “All done” and put the treats away

### *Pro Tips*

1. For small dogs or reluctant dogs, start this game seated
2. Don’t throw food at your dog - you can throw it over their head or just to their side. If you are seated, toss food from side to side
3. Don’t use food that is crumbly and if playing outside, use treats that are on the larger side and highly visible
4. Practice often in different environments

Play this game until your dog is racing back to you with speed and enthusiasm consistently before moving on to the next step.

---

#### Step 4: Add Your Recall Cue

1. Play 2-3 reps of your treat tossing game
2. Say “Get it” and toss a treat away
3. When your dog turns to head towards you, give your recall cue
4. Say “Get it” when they get to you and toss your HIGH value reward behind you
5. Say “Yip” and reward 2-3 more times by hand or, if you are using a toy, play tug with your dog to get them sticking with you
6. Practice 3-5 times per training session, twice daily for several days. It’s best to try to play in different, easy environments whenever possible (but don’t throw your dog to the wolves! Steer clear of high distraction areas early in your training.)

---

#### Step 5: Take it out of the game

1. With your dog on leash, walk into a familiar, low distraction environment
2. When your dog is NOT paying attention to you, position yourself directly behind them
3. Give your recall cue and immediately jog backwards
4. When they get to you, mark with a “Yip!” And deliver 2-3 high value rewards by hand or present their tug toy and play tug with them
5. Say “All done!” and walk on, ignoring them
6. Wait until they are sufficiently distracted before practicing again
7. Strive to practice 3 - 5 times per session, but space out your repetitions so your dog doesn’t become stuck to you like glue!

---

## Step 6: Add Motivation

1. Have a friend or family member hold your dog. It's best if they hold the dog by a short leash attached to a harness that makes it comfortable for your dog to pull. Your friend can also cradle your dog's chest if your dog is comfortable with it.
2. Run away from your dog, encouraging them excitedly as you go.
3. When you get a good distance away, give your recall cue.
4. As soon as you do, your friend should drop the leash and let your dog race over to you.
5. When they get close to you, mark and reward by tossing a treat or their favorite toy behind you.
6. Reward a few times more for good measure, either with a couple of additional treats, or by playing tug with your dog for a bit.
7. Repeat only once or twice per session.

---

## Step 7: Play Hide and Seek

1. Start in a fully fenced area with minimal distractions
2. Let your dog check out, sniff, and disengage
3. As soon as your dog checks out, sneak away and hide somewhere (choose a simple hiding spot to start)
4. When you're hidden, give your recall cue (keep it abrupt and loud so your dog can hear it and understands the cue - try to leave inflection or emotion out when you call your dog to you)
5. Stay quiet and wait for your dog to find you
6. If your dog struggles, wait for a little bit and let them problem solve - but if it goes on for too long, you can rustle around and make some noise to help them
7. If you don't want to let your dog disengage, you can have a friend hold your dog back, like you practiced in restrained recalls, except this time, you can run away and hide before calling your dog.

---

## Step 8: Add distractions

When you've spent time playing the games and your dog is coming with enthusiasm and motivation in a low distraction environment, you can strategically add distractions.

### Here are some ideas:

1. Put items that have NO value in a familiar area (things like a sweatshirt on the ground, an empty cardboard box, some shoes, etc). With your dog ON leash, walk into the area, let them investigate the items and as they do, give your recall cue and reward when they get to you. Repeat often with different "staged distractions"
2. Put items that have value in your training space and repeat. You can use cookies in a jar, or a toy that is just out of reach (keep your dog on leash and prevent them from self-rewarding)
3. Take your dog to a quiet parking lot outside of business hours, let them check out the environment, position yourself directly behind them and give you recall cue, running backward and rewarding well when they get to you.
4. Take your dog to a parking lot during business hours when they are ready for more distractions. Just be cautious of traffic as you work.
5. Randomly insert your recall cue into walks and hikes

### When working around distractions

1. Start easy and set your dog up for success - don't throw them to the wolves!
2. Always position yourself directly behind your dog before calling them
3. Around really tricky distractions, it helps to back up towards the distraction and reward by hand before pivoting behind your dog and giving your recall cue. This sets your dog up to have some great successes with their recall cue around big challenges.
4. Run backwards after calling your dog and reward well when they get to you

# Training Guide

The reward I will use is: \_\_\_\_\_ My recall cue is: \_\_\_\_\_  
My Marker Cue (reward from hand) is: \_\_\_\_\_  
My Marker Cue (thrown reward) is: \_\_\_\_\_

## Training Schedule

---

### Week 1

1. Play your treat tossing game 3-5 times twice daily
2. Begin in a low distraction environment and change environments daily, always keeping the new environments easy for your dog
3. Add your recall cue into your games once your dog is regularly coming back to you with speed.

---

### Week 2

1. Play your treat tossing game 3-5 times twice daily with your recall cue added in
2. Change environments daily, always keeping the new environments easy for your dog (i.e. move from the front yard, to the back yard etc)
3. Twice daily, take your dog into a new space with mild, easy distractions and let them explore.
4. As they are distracted, position yourself behind them and give your recall cue, racing backwards after cueing and rewarding well when they get to you.
5. Experiment with different low value distractions, and different easy environments.

#### **Ideas:**

1. Place a few cardboard boxes in your living room. Bring your dog into the room to explore. As they are investigating, practice your recall!
2. Take your dog into your yard and let them sniff a bush or tree. While they are sniffing, get behind them and practice your recall!

---

## Week 3

1. Continue playing your treat tossing games daily
2. Continue exposing your dog to mild distractions and new environments and practice your recalls daily
3. Practice Restrained Recalls 2-3 times per week in a safe, fenced space
4. Play Hide and Seek recall games as often as you'd like! (They are really fun!)

### **Ideas:**

1. Take your dog to a quiet, empty parking lot of a church, school or store outside of operating hours. Let your dog explore and use the time to practice your recalls.
2. When you're at home, place several closed jars with treats inside on the ground. Let your dog investigate them and as they do, practice your recall.
3. With your dog on leash, place their favorite toy just out of reach and when they look at it, give your recall cue and reward!
4. Practice recalls randomly in quiet areas on walks or hikes.

---

## Week 4

1. Continue playing your treat tossing games daily
2. Slowly increase the difficulty of the distractions in your training sessions, exposing your dog to more challenging items or environments, without pushing too hard.
3. Practice Restrained Recalls 2-3 times per week
4. Play Hide and Seek recall games as often as you'd like! (They are really fun!)

### **Ideas:**

1. Take your dog to a busy parking lot during business hours (just be careful of traffic) and let your dog sniff around (remember, they should be on leash!). When they are distracted, get behind them and practice your recall.
2. Take your dog to a grassy space where dogs frequent OUTSIDE of busy times. Let your dog sniff and explore while on leash. When they are invested in the environment, position yourself behind them and practice your recall.
3. Practice inside of pet friendly stores (i.e. the Home Depot, Pet Stores outside of peak hours etc)

## *Pro Tips*

1. When working in new environments, or around distractions keep your dog on leash. Use a 6ft lead in new environments until your dog is coming reliably. Then graduate to using a 30ft lead. (If you need help using the longer lead effectively, [here's a video](#))
2. Reward your dog every single time they come to you, and don't use your cue unless you are prepared to reinforce.
3. Practice daily, but keep your sessions short. You don't want your dog to get bored.
4. Take one day off every week from training, so that the games hold their value for your dog.
5. Don't practice recall cues back to back - always wait until your dog is sufficiently distracted before practicing your cue.
6. Don't be afraid to take your time and go slow.
7. Don't make your dog sit when they come to you. This will slow down their recall. Instead, reward repetitively to help them learn to stick with you.
8. If your dog is doing something fun when you recall them, let them go right back to doing it after earning their reward (if it's appropriate to do so). This way they learn that coming when called doesn't always mean the fun has to end.
9. Refrain from scolding your dog, or taking things from them, or otherwise getting frustrated when using your recall cue. This has to stay fun for your dog!