

# Recall Training



If you're planning to let your dog off-lead eventually, it is vital to teach a strong recall cue. This will prevent your dog from running away and becoming lost or injured, but is also needed in order to prevent your dog from approaching other dogs or people without their consent (see our Responsible Dog Ownership fact sheet for more information on why this is so important). Even if you do not intend to exercise your dog off-lead, teaching a strong recall cue will make all the difference if they ever manage to escape from your home, or get away from you on a walk.

## *Before letting your dog off-lead*

When adopting a rescue sighthound, it is important to remember that many of them will never be able to safely run off-lead other than inside a fully secure, private field-for-hire. Others will be able to run off-lead only in specific environments, where there are no distractions (such as other dogs, or wildlife).

This is because sighthounds have been selectively bred for both the motivation and ability to spot and chase moving objects. In the case of most rescue sighthounds, they have also been trained and encouraged to do this during their career as a racing or working dog. As such, they are not only more likely to disappear after something interesting in the distance, but they also have the speed and strength to cover huge distances in a very short period of time. This means that if your hound runs away, they are likely to be much harder to locate and catch than many other breeds of dog.



In addition, if your hound has a very high prey drive, it is unlikely to be safe or responsible to allow them off-lead in public. This is not only because of the risk that they may injure a wild animal, livestock or another pet, but also for their own safety. When a dog is in pursuit of a prey item, they are entirely focused on that goal and will not pay attention to hazards such as traffic, barbed wire or other potential dangers.

If you are dead set on regularly walking your new dog off-lead, a sighthound may not be the breed for you! It is not unusual for hounds who have been taught a reliable recall and who have been running off-lead for years to suddenly take off and disappear under the right set of circumstances. Most experienced sighthound owners are extremely cautious about when and where they allow off-lead exercise, if at all.

## ***Safety first***

- Your new dog should always be kept on a lead for **at least** the first 6 weeks. This will allow you to become familiar with their behaviour and decide whether off-lead exercise is likely to be appropriate for them, as well as giving you time to build strong bond of trust and security. You should use this time to start working on your recall cue, which is best practised inside the home or garden initially.
- Before letting your dog off-lead, ensure your dog's microchip details are up to date and that they are always wearing an ID tag with your name, phone number and address. Should anything go wrong on your walk this will help to get your dog quickly and safely returned to you.
- Ensure that your garden and any other areas your dog may be off lead are securely fenced. Remember that sighthounds are particularly good at finding gaps in hedges and jumping over high fences. Keep things like tables and bins away from the fence, as these can act as a bounce pad for the dog and help them escape.
- Never use an extendable or "flexi" lead when practising recall or simply walking your dog. These leads give you little or no control over your dog, and can cause serious injury if they become wrapped around yourself or your dog. Instead, use a long line – a long, solid fabric lead available in a variety of lengths (similar to a horse lunge line). This should always be clipped onto a harness and never a neck collar. If your dog runs to the end of the line and is brought to a sudden stop whilst the line is secured to their collar, there is a real risk of severe damage to the dogs neck, trachea and oesophagus.
- We would never advise walking a dog off-lead near a road, or near livestock unless the area is fully and securely fenced in with no chance of escape.

## ***Building a bond***

The first step in training a reliable recall is building a strong relationship with your new dog. Your dog is much more likely to return to you if they trust you, feel safe around you and enjoy your company! We want your dog to associate you with all things fun and rewarding, so that they will choose you over other distractions when off-lead. If you do discover that your new dog is not a candidate for off-lead exercise, this doesn't mean you have a poor bond with them. Some dogs just struggle with responding to a recall cue when there are more exciting things to investigate!

Spending quality time at home, in the garden and during on-lead walks can really boost the bond between you and your new dog. Do things with your dog that they really enjoy - whether this be having a good fuss, learning new things, or playing with their favourite toys. The more fun your dog has with you on a regular basis, the more they will be inclined to stick with you on walks.

To ensure that your dog trusts and feels totally safe around you, make sure to avoid all punishment based training in daily life. If you physically punish or even just shout at your dog when they show unwanted behaviours, they will find it impossible to trust you completely. This will make them wary of returning to you

when off-lead, since you can be unpredictable and scary! See our fact sheet on Dog Training Methods for more information on why we always advise using positive reinforcement when training your dog.

## *Becoming the reward*

Ex-racing greyhounds and ex-working lurchers have been taught from a young age to chase a fast-moving fluffy thing, so when they see one of these on a walk their previous training may automatically kick in! We need to retrain them to see us as the more exciting prospect in these situations.

You can work on this whilst walking your dog on-lead, by offering a high value and tasty food reward every time something moves past or around you quickly (whether this be a leaf, wildlife or another dog). This simple technique will help your dog to make the connection between spotting a fast-moving item, and looking to you for something tasty. With practice, this will teach your dog to look back to you whenever they are tempted to chase something.

## *The Name Game*

Initially your dog may not know their name, particularly if they were named on arrival with the charity or if you have changed their name. Dogs tend to learn their name quite quickly through repetition - simple things like calling their name before walking away to invite them to come with you, before handing over a treat or when playing can help to build an association.

If your dog has a long name you may wish to use a shortened version for recall purposes. Usually two syllable names are easiest for your dog to recognise and respond to. In a multi-dog household it can be useful to train a 'catch-all' by teaching all dogs to respond to their own name as well as to the word 'dogs' used to call everyone to you at once.

The **Name Game** is a simple game which can help your dog learn to respond reliably to their name.

- Start training at home, or in the garden. Be prepared with a handful of food rewards. Throw out one reward away from you, for your dog to follow and eat. The moment they have eaten it, call their name and immediately hold out your hand to offer another reward. When your dog returns to you feed that reward and repeat.
- Practice this until your dog comes back to you as soon as you call their name, without needing to be shown the second food reward in your hand first.
- Now you can practice this simple game on-lead, in a variety of walking environments. This will teach your dog to respond to their name in every different environment they might experience, rather than just at home! Call your dog's name regularly during a walk (choose moments when they're not overly distracted at first) and reward them for looking at you.

## ***Teaching a recall cue***

- Now that your dog is reliably responding to their name, you may want to introduce a specific recall cue. This will make it easier for your dog to understand when you're asking them to return to you, since they probably hear their name in a lot of different contexts other than during recall. You can use any word you want, but "come!" and "here!" are popular choices.
- Start in the home or garden, when your dog is fairly nearby. Call your dog's name, and then immediately say the recall cue you've chosen. Try to use an exciting, positive and inviting tone of voice when giving the recall cue. Reward your dog as usual when they come over for their treat.
- If your dog looks at you upon hearing their name and the recall cue but does not approach, encourage them to you by crouching down with open arms or showing them the treat.
- Practice this regularly, increasing the distance between you gradually until your dog is eagerly running over to you upon hearing their name and the recall cue.
- Try calling them when they are in another room, or slightly more distracted (e.g. sniffing something in the garden, or playing with a toy). It's important that you keep things easy at first, and very gradually build up to using the cue with distractions present. If you make things too hard too quickly, your dog will not know the cue well enough to respond and will learn to ignore it!
- If there are other family members at home, try playing a recall game in the garden. Each person takes it in turn to call the dog and reward them for coming over, before the next person does the same.
- If your dog is not food motivated, try using other rewards. You could reward your dog with a game of tug, by throwing a ball, or by giving them a big fuss!

## ***Recall in the real world***

Your dog may now have an awesome recall in the garden, but we need to make sure they will reliably respond to it everywhere before letting them off lead. When dogs learn a new behaviour on cue, they normally need to re-learn it in each different environment they're likely to need to respond. This is why some dogs are perfectly behaved in training classes, but seem to forget everything once they're out of the classroom!

- To start with, choose a quiet outdoor area with few distractions. If you jump in at the deep and start by trying to recall your dog in a busy park full of other dogs and squirrels, you're not likely to have much luck, and your recall cue will be damaged. A secure field for hire is ideal, since you can be sure no distractions are going to appear unexpectedly.
- Have your dog on a long line attached to a harness. This will allow you to practice recalling your dog from greater and greater distances, without fear of losing them if they don't respond! Try to let out and gather in the line as your dog moves further away and closer to you, so that it doesn't drag on

the floor and get tangled around either of your legs. Do not wrap the excess line around your hand, otherwise you could be injured if your dog suddenly takes off at speed! Instead, gather the excess in loose loops and hold these in your hand. Always come to your dog's assistance if the lead manages to work its way around a limb or their body. Be aware that your hound may respond to the sudden sense of freedom by launching into zoomies!

- Allow your dog to thoroughly investigate the area before attempting to recall them – remember that we want distractions to be at a minimum to start with. When your dog is only a fairly short distance from you, call their name and the recall cue as usual, and reward them for returning to you.
- Keep practising, building up to greater distances as you go. If your dog is slow to respond, avoid calling them repeatedly (as they will soon learn to ignore you this way!). Instead, try to be more exciting – once you've called them, crouch down and wave your open arms, lie on the floor, or run in the other direction! If your dog seems to be struggling, go back to an easier distance and practice a bit more.
- With the long line as a safety net practice your recall in as many environments as you can, starting with easy, low-distraction areas and building up to more challenging ones when your dog is ready. Remember to make it as easy as possible for your dog to respond when you first move to each new environment.
- Only remove the long line once you are confident that your dog will respond to their recall cue reliably in that environment. You may wish to return to the secure field when you first try your dog fully off-lead. Remember that some dogs will never be able to come off the long line, and others will only be able to do so in certain environments. Never take a risk if you are not sure!

### ***Top tips for reliable recall***

- Even if your dog is slow to return to you, never punish your dog when they eventually come back. Always reward them for returning, even if it has taken longer than you'd like, or if your dog has done something you'd rather they hadn't before returning. Punishing them on their return will only make them less willing to come back to you in future! If your dog was not able to return quickly enough or performed an unwanted behaviour, they may need more practice on a long line, or even to stay on-lead in this environment.
- If your dog is not returning to you when called, you may be feeling angry or frustrated. Don't let your dog know this! If you start to sound or look angry when calling your dog, they will be reluctant to come back. Always keep an upbeat, positive and inviting voice when using your recall cue.
- Beware of setting your dog up to fail – if you release them in a squirrel-dense area and can't get them back, don't blame your dog! Be realistic in what you expect your dog to achieve, remembering their instincts and previous training.

- Make sure you practice recall regularly during your walk (ideally every few minutes) and that you often let your dog go again after rewarding them. If you only call your dog back at the end of the walk, or when you want to put them on-lead, they'll quickly learn to ignore you and extend their fun!
- Always carry treats with you on a walk, so you can reward your dog every time they come back when called. It should always be worth their while to respond, and you need to be more exciting than anything else they might be doing. During the initial training, or in new environments, you should use high value rewards. Once your dog is responding reliably you can switch to lower value treats, but try carrying a variety of different treats with you, including the odd really high value item - this will keep your dog interested. If they recall from a particularly distracting situation, give them a jackpot reward (feed lots of treats in quick succession).
- Be aware of your surroundings whilst your dog is off-lead. If you spot any potential distractions or dangers, you can call your dog to you before they notice it themselves.

## *Emergency recall*

As well as your everyday recall cue, you may want to teach an emergency recall. Teaching an emergency recall could save your dog's life. It is designed for use only in emergency situations - such as if your dog has slipped through the front door and is running towards traffic, or has slipped the harness and is running towards a field of sheep.

Since your dog hears their daily recall cue all the time, they may be less likely to respond to it when they're extra distracted or pumped full of adrenaline. The emergency recall cue is more likely to get a response in these situations because:

- We train this cue using a super high value, jackpot reward which is better than any other reward they normally get. They only get this special reward for responding to the emergency recall, and never at any other time.
- We always use the same super high value reward, and never switch to a lower value reward once training is complete.
- We only use this cue during training sessions, unless there is an emergency situation in real life. This means the cue is very clear and specific, and always predicts an amazing reward - unlike the daily recall cue which is used in a lot of different contexts (some of which are more rewarding than others!).
- We choose a cue word (or sound) which your dog only hears in this situation, meaning they will pay attention whenever they hear it.

To teach an emergency recall, you first need to decide on your cue. This should be something clear and loud that your dog never normally hears. It could be a word, or you could use a whistle (if you use a whistle, remember to always have one with you on walks, and keep one near the front door too!). You also need to

figure out what food rewards your dog really loves more than anything else. Once you decide on your reward, be sure to save it only for emergency recall training and never use it at any other time.

- Starting inside the home with your dog right next to you (and not distracted) give your emergency recall cue. Immediately take hold of your dog's collar and start feeding them their jackpot of super high value rewards. Keep feeding treats one at a time, in quick succession for about 30 seconds (your dog will find this much more rewarding than being given a handful of the treats all in one go). As soon as you finish feeding the treats, give a release cue (such as "all done!") and let them go back to whatever they were doing previously.
- It's important to take hold of the collar before you start rewarding, because in a real life emergency you'll probably need to get hold of your dog quickly and keep hold of them. We want your dog to expect to be grabbed by the collar, so that it doesn't spook them when you try to do it in real life!
- Practise this once every day to start with, gradually building up the distance your dog is from you when you give the cue. Once your dog is rushing over to you immediately whenever you give the cue, you can start practicing in other locations and contexts. If your dog doesn't rush over, your reward might not be exciting enough!
- Start by moving into the garden to practice, then start practising outside the house whilst on-lead, before moving to off-lead situations. At this stage you can practice a couple of times per week, rather than every day if you wish. Just like the daily recall cue, you want to set your dog up to succeed. Only increase the difficulty level very gradually.
- It is also a good idea to practice in areas and situations where you're likely to need to use the cue for real. Practice at the front door (with your dog on a long line) when getting out of the car, in the park etc.
- Remember, never use this cue outside of training unless it's a real emergency (if you're lucky, you'll never need to use it for real!). It may be tempting to use it when you're late for work and your dog doesn't want to come in from the garden, but you must resist this temptation! We need to keep this cue totally separate from normal, everyday life if we want it to be effective.



- If you do ever need to use the cue for real, it's unlikely that you'll have your super high value rewards to hand. In this case, be sure to make a huge fuss of your dog, and jackpot reward them with the highest value food you have to hand. If you're at home, you can keep praising your dog whilst you head to the fridge to grab something extra special!
- Even once the cue is taught, you need to keep practising it at least once per week for the rest of your dog's life. If your dog forgets the cue, it won't work in an emergency situation.

The information provided in this document provides general guidance on the matters outlined and is not intended to replace the need for you to take qualified and appropriate behaviour/training advice on these matters.

Please remember, that as an owner of a Forever Hounds Trust dog you have access to our team of qualified behaviourists and FREE behaviour and training advice. No matter what your behaviour or training question is, we are here to help. You can contact the team by emailing: [behaviour@foreverhoundstrust.org](mailto:behaviour@foreverhoundstrust.org)

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