

## *Integrative Veterinary Care*

### The Recall

Brenda G. Mills, DVM

Commonly known as “come” or “here”, the recall is one of the most useful and essential commands a dog can know. Whether you want your dog to do a formal obedience recall where he sits straight in front of you when he comes or whether you just want your dog to come close enough that you can touch him is up to you. Some people teach “come” to mean one and “here” to mean the other.

Those of you who have already had difficulties with the recall are at a disadvantage. You have to find a new word to use for the recall. The “here” or “come” that your dog has already learned to ignore just will not do. For a reliable recall, your dog has to learn that he cannot ignore the command to come and has to do it every time you say the word right from the start. Start by choosing a new word, in another language if necessary. You must make certain that everyone who will be calling the dog can pronounce and remember your recall word, and no one but you may use the word except during a training exercise until the command is reliable. The best recall words are short and have a consonant sound at the beginning and the end, prompting the dog's attention.

#### **Teaching the Recall**

Always say your dog's name to get his attention before giving the recall command. The only exception to this rule is when you know you already have your dog's attention, as when calling him from a sit or down stay during a formal training session.

Begin with your dog on a six-foot leash. Have treats available, preferably hidden out of sight but easily accessible. I prefer to begin in the comfort of my own living room, where the surroundings are comfortable and distractions are at a minimum. Put your dog on a sit-stay, move in front of him to the end of the leash, then say your release word, your dog's name, and your recall command. As you say the recall word, crouch down in front of your dog with your arms open to invite him to you and use a happy, pleasant tone of voice. As soon as your dog begins to move toward you, tell him “good dog”. As soon as he gets to you, praise, pet, and treat your dog. Some dogs may be hesitant at first. Do not say the recall word multiple times -- instead, do anything else you can think of to encourage your dog toward you. This includes luring him with a treat, whistling, backing up, inviting play, anything that will get him to move towards you.

Remember that being too excited will cause timid dogs to engage in “avoidance” behavior. If your dog looks away from you, crouches and slinks toward you, or circles out to one side when approaching you, you may need to calm down a bit.

Once your dog is responding readily to your recall word in the living room, it's time to take it into other rooms of the house, the back yard, the front yard, etc. At this stage, the recall can only be worked while your dog is on leash, allowing you to ensure compliance by simply backing away from your dog while holding the leash and keeping your dog from leaving the vicinity when you ask him to recall.

When the recall is solid from a sit-stay and a down-stay, begin asking for it in a more realistic situation -- while your dog is in motion and looking at other things, like on a walk. Wait until your dog is completely engrossed in some really yummy smell or is just not showing any sign of paying attention to you. Say his name and the recall word and then back up. When your dog looks at you, praise him. When he moves toward you, praise him more. When he gets to you, give him a treat! With practice, you will ask for higher standards of performance, eventually

saving praise for the dog moving towards you and treats for an immediate, rapid response to your recall word.

When you have a rapid response (ie when your dog is responding to your recall command in what you have envisioned as the perfect manner while distracted on a six-foot leash), it's time to make the exercise more difficult. Start using longer leashes (ie 12 foot or longer long lines) and let your dog work farther away from you. Start asking for recalls in situations with more intense distractions, like next to the jungle gym at the neighborhood park or within view of a flock of ducks or livestock.

The next step is to begin asking for the recall off-leash in your own home. Put a tab leash on your dog, just long enough to be easy to grab and to allow you to walk comfortably while holding it. Make sure your tab does not have a handle, or it may get caught on your dog's leg or the furniture. With the tab on your dog, ask him to recall (say his name first) from across the room. If he fails to come, do not make a big deal about it. Simply go to your dog, take the tab, and lead him back to your starting point. When you get there, tell him what a good dog he is and say "good [recall word]" several times. Do not repeat your request to recall! Remember to treat and praise enthusiastically when your dog performs well!

Once the recall is reliable when you call your dog from the same room, begin asking for a recall from out of sight. The procedure is the same as for a recall in the same room. Use your tab, say your dog's name first to get his attention, then say your recall word. If you don't get an immediate response, help your dog. Go to him and encourage him. You may only need to come into view to get him to come or you may need to take the tab and walk him to the location you called him from. Remember that if your dog takes even one step towards you, you must praise him. Also remember that by taking the tab and leading your dog to the location you called him from, you are assisting him or correcting him. You are not punishing him. The tab should be taken gently and he should be led calmly and without frustration.

You must never punish your dog when he has come to you, either on a recall or of his own will. One of the keys to a successful recall is having a dog who always wants to come to you.

Once your dog's recall is 95% reliable for you, with the tab on, in the house, you can begin doing the tab exercise in the yard or in any fenced area. You may wish to use a six or eight foot length of light plastic clothesline or 90-lb. test nylon cord out in the yard to make it easier to catch up to your dog for an "assist" if needed. At any point after the initial recall exercise, you can start having other members of the household or friends work the basic on-leash recall sequence with your dog as well.