

Teaching your dog to come

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Come is my favorite command, not because it's the easiest, not because it's the most fun to watch, but because I know that this one command can save my dog's life. I have been at the dog beach or the dog park countless times, watching owners shout "Come!" while their dogs, seemingly laughing, run away from them. I walk away, shaking my head. I am sure that owner would love to have their dog come when it's called. Unfortunately, many of us make mistakes in the handling of the word "come" that makes our dogs not *want* to come.

How many of us are guilty of the following?

"Lucky, I said COME!" "Come, Lucky, come" "That's it!" And you drag lucky over to you and punish him for not coming

Lucky is out playing in the backyard. He is having the time of his doggy life. Then you tell him to come, and bring him inside away from all that fun

You call Lucky to "come" for some nasty tasting medicine or his dreaded bath time...

What you have just done is taught Lucky that it isn't any fun to come to you. Is it any wonder that he runs the other way? If every time someone called me I got yelled at, I wouldn't go near that person anymore either!

So how do we correct it? How do we get our dogs to come to us? It's very simple. Here is what we are going to do. We are going to teach Lucky that coming to you means treats, praise and lots of fun!

While Lucky is distracted doing something else, you are going to call him in the most child-like, silly, excited voice that you have. "Lucky, Lucky, (obviously, use your own dog's name) puppy, snoogie, sweet'ems dog!" 9 times out of 10 your puppy will come running over to see what you're so excited about.

If he heads your way, run away from him. That will get him even more excited to see what you're up to! (Never chase after your dog, not even in play. Always get your dog to chase you. Not only does this behavior help in the "come" command, but it also establishes your place as pack leader.)

When your dog gets 98% towards you, have a treat in your hand, swoop your arm across your chest and say happily "come*". Then give him the treat with one hand and gently grab his collar with your other. Grabbing his collar is a very important part of this command. We've all experienced our dogs getting close to us, but as we reach for that collar, they dance away – out of reach. We want Lucky to know that when we say "come" holding his collar in our hand is part of that.

As soon as lucky comes to you, you're going to give him fun interaction for 20 seconds. "Fun interaction" can mean playing, a couple treats, maybe just petting and praise. If possible have his favorite toy hidden and pull that out. Then, before he gets bored, release him with an exuberant "Okay!"

***Note:** Make sure you do not say the word "Come" until the dog is almost on top of you. If you say it too soon, the dog may get distracted and wander off. If the dog manages to wander off before you get his collar in your hand, you have effectively taught him that not only is there no consequence when he doesn't come to you, but that "come" means to wander around and do whatever he wants. Remember, when you use the word "come" you are teaching this command off leash, so you can't really do anything to back it up.