

TEACHING COME

by Tawni McBee, PDTI

I am not the trainer for everyone; no one trainer is. Some will pooh-pooh my ideas, some will love them, and some will get angry about them. I get results and I've never harmed a dog.

To teach come: I use a variety of methods depending on the dog. I do not ever call a dog out of a stay command for at least the first year following training. To that end, I frequently use my friend, Dick Russell's, paper plate recalls. Now, if you live where it's as wet as it is in Louisiana where Dick lives, using a paper plate for this probably works because the darned thing probably sticks to the ground! In AZ, it's way too dry and paper plates become sailboats on the wind. I use plastic lids. They have a nice lip to hold in the treats you'll be using and they tend to stay in place and you can recycle! This is basic targeting, for those who are in to that sort of thing. When I start, I move the dog around, but for the first week, I never move the lid once training has begun. Now this doesn't mean nail that sucker to the ground! It means each training session put the lid on the ground and leave it there during THAT session. Once you've advanced, you can move the lid. You can use more lids. You can do all sorts of wonderful things. This is a very versatile exercise.

But on to the basics.

Dog should be on leash and training collar/device of your choice. Yes, I have preferences, but they don't much matter with this exercise. Being on leash DOES matter.

Use very tiny treats. Tinier than Charlee Bears. Kong tidbits? Break them in half. TINY! However, the treats must be very appetizing for the dog. I use freeze dried liver, or, for hardcore nothing less will do, tiny bits of hotdog. Cut them up tiny and freeze them. Take out a few at a time. Avoids slippery, stinky stuff in your treat pouch. Use a baggy for hot dogs!! That stuff stinks up a treat pouch for eternity! (Digression: Want a cheap, washable treat pouch? Cut the pockets out of an old pair of jeans, retaining the waist band and belt loops. Thread the old pocket onto your belt for a presto recycled washable treat pouch. Another Dick Russell special.)

Put your plate onto the ground/floor. Put the dog in sit about 2 feet away from the plate. Keep an eye on the dog. Place a tiny treat onto the plate. If the dog gets up, NO, sit! Sit means sit. No need for wait

or stay. (You HAVE already taught your dog sit, right?) Point at the treat/plate and say Rover (oh come on. Use YOUR dog's name here!) -
---- start again, Rover, Away, Get-it. Run those last two words together. Let Rover get the treat. If Rover doesn't immediately go for the treat, guide him to it. The minute Rover has nabbed the treat, back away (do not turn and run or walk away, BACK UP) briskly and say Rover, COME in a very happy tone of voice. Repeat the word come all you like while becoming very happy, party time, excited/exciting. This is one of the rare times I advocate repeating commands except when working with an e-collar. If, BTW, you are working with an e-collar, the command come would each time be accompanied by a tap on the collar. A few feet away, come to a stop and tell Rover to sit. Pet Rover and act like a bloody fool over him and tell him what a genius he is.

Repeat this 5-10 times, moving around the plate to a different starting place. You will then gradually, over the next few days, move Rover away from the plate. You may even go to a long line if you are able and own one. You will walk Rover past the plate and not allow him to get the treat until you send him for it. Use your imagination to extend this OR sign up for classes and I will give you further instruction on extending this exercise. Most important is that Rover learns that Come is a good thing. Oh, you may also have a treat to give Rover on his sit in front of you at random times. Bears repeating: RANDOM times. Give treats out of the palm of the left hand.

Long line method: If you have never worked with a long line, use a shorter leash and back up. Yes, BACK UP again. Turning and walking away is not teaching come. Put the dog in a sit or down. Go to the end of the leash/long line. Call the dog. Happy time. Party time. Come is ALWAYS a happy command. Do not ever call your dog to you for punishment! Random treats are fine. RANDOM.

Everyday reinforcement: Call your dog to you often. I care not what command you use in spite of my using the word come above. Commands just have to be consistent. More than one can be taught. One of my dogs knows about 7 varieties of come, all of which mean something slightly different. Do NOT call your dog to you to get after him. Do NOT call your dog to you for only "bad" things like going into the crate or going to the Vet or leaving play. When playing, call the dog, pat or treat and release to play again. Repeat often. Do this many times a day.

Use the same call word. Ideas: Come, Here/Hier, To Me, Now, Front, Heel (come to heel position), Finish (come to heel position, usually around the off side), By me, etc.

Walk up to your dog frequently when you want nothing. Sometimes pet him/her. Sometimes not. Sometimes have a toy or treat for him/her. When you reach to pet your dog, reach also for the collar so the dog does not learn to associate grabbing the collar with confinement.

A bit late here, but puppy stuff mostly: Teach your dog its name. If it isn't really the dog's name, it will take longer. See the Names article for more information. Trust me, dog's know what their names are supposed to be and frequently will resent being called by the wrong name. Call the dog by name: Rover, come.

The dog's name, like the word come and praise is always light and happy and friendly. Resist the thing parents used to do with their kids (you don't do that, right?) when they were upset: repeating the entire name harshly: Jonathan Appleseed Jones come here this instant! The dog's name should get attention to you, nothing else. It should not mean come. What do you do when someone lightly, happily says your name? I'll bet you simply look up at them, right? That's what you want your dog to do. If you have children, enlist their help. Kids usually love helping train the dog, but are inconsistent and get bored easily. So make it fun. Have the kids play hide and seek with the dog. At first, the kids will need to 'hide' in plain sight and you will say "Rover, go find Johnny!" Johnny will happily call Rover! Rover! Come! and be ecstatic when Rover goes to him. Gradually, the kids will hide and you will continue with "Rover, go find Johnny!" Johnny will gradually fade out the 'Rover, come' part and just be very happy when Rover finds him. Guess what? You just also taught Rover what the word "Johnny" means and how fun it is to find Johnny (who, BTW, will have a treat or two once in awhile for Rover when Rover finds him). If Johnny, heaven forbid, ever gets lost, chances are, Rover can help you find him! This does NOT make Rover a search and rescue dog (SAR). SAR dogs are highly trained dogs. It might make Rover a help if he's needed to help find Johnny. It does not ensure it. The hide and seek game can, and should, be used in a variety of settings.