



ANIMAL HOSPITAL OF NORTH ASHEVILLE

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## AHNA Puppy Preschool: How to teach a recall

When you first get your puppy at around 8 weeks of age, she will likely come every time you call her or make a noise to get her attention. You are thrilled that teaching her to come when called is so easy. Don't be fooled! As your puppy grows older, usually starting at 3-4 months of age, she will become more independent and willing to go on excursions by herself. Suddenly, a good squirrel sniff becomes so much more interesting than you, no matter how often you call her name.

This is when we humans make the following mistakes:

- We say "come" over and over (without having taught the meaning of the cue or the possibility to reel her in), rendering the word meaningless for the puppy.
- When the puppy does come, it often means the end of a pleasurable experience (end of play, sniffing, or yard time) or worse, is followed by an aversive (being groomed or even punished).

No wonder puppy stops coming when called!

Set the foundation for a solid recall by

- Always rewarding your puppy when she comes to you (with food, attention, play)
- Never using "come" when it is followed by something your puppy doesn't like
- Never using "come" when it ends something your puppy enjoys
- Teaching your puppy that "come when called" is fun (see below)



### Teaching "come when called" à la Dr. Sophia Yin:

Prerequisites: "Sit", dog should have practiced to sit whenever his person stops walking

Recommended gear: 6 ft leash, (hands-free leash preferred); yummy treats; treat pouch

This is a great method to use when you are training by yourself.

Basics:

- You stand with your puppy standing or sitting next to you on the leash.
- Say in an excited voice "[your dog's name here], come" and quickly take a few steps backwards.
- Your puppy should race to catch up and sit. If he is not used to sitting when you stop walking, lure him into a sit with a treat the first few times.
- Once your puppy is used to this exercise and keeps his focus on you, walk him in a quiet environment without distractions with a slack leash.
- Run backwards suddenly and say "[your dog's name here], come" in a very encouraging voice.



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- The sudden action should make him run towards you. If he seems to run by you without stopping, hold out a treat at nose-level and lure him into a sit in front of you. You should be able to fade out the lure after two or three repetitions.
- Practice this randomly and repeatedly, cheer him on, make it a fun and unpredictable game!

Advancing the training:

- Gradually add real-life distractions, for example walk by a toy on the ground and do a recall and walk quickly in the other direction, before he has a chance to grab the toy.
- Use mild distractions at first (stationary vs. moving toy). Most people want to up the ante too quickly. If your puppy fails to come, you have gone too far too fast. Start over with an easier level.
- Start using a longer (10 foot) leash. When graduating to a longer leash, start over with mild distractions and work your way up.

End goal:

- Start practicing off-leash recalls in your house and fenced-in yard, while still using a leash on walks or in the park.
- Only call your puppy when you know he will come. Set him up for success!
- Avoid calling “come” several times in a row, when he doesn’t come right away.
- Only let him off-leash (in a dog safe area!) when he comes reliably even with strong distractions.

For more detailed information, refer to “How To Behave So Your Dog Behaves” by Yin, pp. 139-144.

### Teaching “come when called” à la Jean Donaldson:

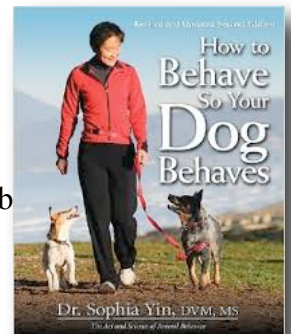
Prerequisites: Puppy knows “sit” cue

Recommended gear: yummy treats or interesting tug toy, treat pouch; the first steps are practiced inside, so a leash is not required.

For this method, you will need one or more family members or friends to assist you.

Basics:

- You and your assistant are located in different corners of a room or on different ends of a hallway.
- You take turns calling the puppy.
- If the puppy doesn’t come right away, clap your hands or make a high-pitch noise.
- The caller praises the puppy while he/she is approaching.
- Once the puppy is there, the caller asks the puppy to sit (you may have to lure if puppy doesn’t know the cue yet).



- Once the puppy sits, the caller gently grabs the collar with one hand and delivers a treat with the other. Alternatively, play a short round of tug as a reward (keep the toy hidden until the puppy sits).
- Practice this in a few short sessions.
- Slowly fade out the hand clapping or attention-getting noise, as well as the cheering while the puppy approaches, but continue rewarding as soon as the puppy arrives at the caller's location.
- Practice in three to four different but quiet locations before moving on to the next level.

#### Advancing the training:

- Two persons are required for this more advanced exercise: a distracter (distracter has very yummy treats or favorite toy) and the handler (handler has no treats or toys).
- Both handler and distracter show the puppy what they have (handler: nothing; distracter: yummy treats or toy).
- The handler moves away and calls the puppy. Most likely, the puppy will ignore the handler and try different behaviors to get treats from the distracter.
- The distracter will ignore all behaviors the puppy may be exhibiting.
- The handler will call the puppy at regular intervals.
- Sooner or later, the puppy will try his luck and go back to the handler. Praise lavishly!!!
- Once the puppy arrives at the handler, the distracter runs over and gives the puppy a yummy treat. Alternatively, the distracter hands the toy over to the handler for a short round of tug.
- Then the distracter takes back the toy and moves away again.
- Start over. This takes a lot of patience and many repetitions, but your puppy will learn that he only gets what he wants when he listens to the handler!
- Alternate roles of distracter and handler, so that the puppy learns to listen to the cue (vs. coming to one specific person).

For more details and higher levels of training refer to "The Culture Clash" by Jean Donaldson, pp. 181-189.

