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COURTEOUS CANINE, Inc.
Dog School and Doggie Gym!

Coming when Called

One of the most important cues you can teach your dog is coming when called. If you practice nothing else, practice this cue every day. Never call your dog to you and do anything the dog does not like. For example, calling the dog to you and clipping her nails. This will destroy your coming when called cue. Coming to you, should always indicate something wonderful to your dog.

Coming When Called Games

Coming when called (the recall) is an extremely important cue for safety.

Restrained Recall Game

One of my personal favorites, this game requires a second person to hold your dog while you run away from her and eventually call her. Variations include pumping your dog up by gently thumping on her chest and shoving her away from you toward the person holding her to make her eager to come to you. Of course, this needs to be adjusted for fearful dogs. Always do what is fun to the individual dog. If your dog becomes frightened when she's restrained, gradually desensitize her. In an advanced restrained recall, the person restraining the dog holds on one or two seconds longer, causing the dog to strain against the hold. When released she will fly toward you and can be clicked and reinforced with an intense game of tug or food.

This game teaches your dog to drive hard toward you. Be sure to play variations where you change your body position when you recall your dog. You want speed regardless of whether you are standing, running, walking, sitting or lying on the ground. Use the same word and tone when calling your dog. This is your emergency recall and you need it to be the most rehearsed behavior.

Run and Hide Game

If your dog gets distracted or does not respond to your first cue for attention, hide as quickly as you can. You are removing your presence for failure to immediately respond to your attention cue. If you play this game well, your dog will stick to you like glue and never let you out of her sight.

In order for this game to work, you must have established enough of a reinforcement history (bond) for your dog to play this game. This bond has to be stronger than all the interesting things in your dog's environment. If you are training a terrier or hound this can be a challenging thing to do. Start playing indoors and hide a very short distance away. When your dog finds you, lavishly reinforce her.

A variation of this game is to have a friend distract your dog while you hide. Your dog learns that if she takes her eyes off you, you may disappear! If you play this game a lot and set your dog up for success, this game will teach your dog to stay focused on you.

Hide and Seek

Have your dog sit-stay, then walk away and hide from her view. Release with "okay" and call her name. Use her name, not your recall cue as it may take her a few minutes to find you, and you don't want a delayed response for your recall cue. When she finds you, click and reinforce by playing a wild game. Gradually build up to hiding in places that are harder and harder to find.

This game teaches your dog to find you even when you are not visible and to persist in her search. It will help strengthen your reinforcement history and turn finding you into a game.

Popcorn Game

Clicker trainer Diane Conroy teaches her students the following recall game. Throw a piece of popcorn across the room. When your dog has eaten it, call the dog back and click and reinforce the recall with a piece of meat. An advanced version of this game is to recall the dog before she gets to the popcorn. The aim is to teach the dog to come even with distractions present. The game works if your dog likes meat more than popcorn: you pay more for coming and less for moving away. Use any two foods, as long as the dog values one more highly than the other. This is a great game to play on a rainy day and is useful for strengthening recalls in young puppies.

Collar Game

Tell your dog, "I'm gonna get your collar" as you playfully reach for her collar then pop a piece of food in her mouth. This game will teach your dog that grabbing the collar is fun and predicts a treat. In an emergency, your dog may need to be grabbed by the collar, so making it a game prevents your dog from being fearful or defensive when her collar is grabbed.

Rubs and Scratching Game

A great reinforcer for many dogs is already attached to your body and always available! Your hands are great tools for reinforcing your dog. Be creative and discover what

types of touch and praise your dog likes, so you can use them to reinforce your most important cue.

Most dog bites occur to hands, so it is vital to teach your dog that hands are the source of good things. Never hit a dog as this teaches that hands are the source of pain.

Mini Recalls

If your dog is very distracted or very active you can use the mini recalls game to get her started. Grab your dog, collar, leash and treats. Attach the leash and collar to your dog and wait for her to explore the environment. When she does, call her name and 'come' in a FUN and excited way. Click and treat when your dog moves towards you. Since your dog only has a few feet to move, just keep calling her to you again and again. Change locations to help her generalize and learn to come when called in all situations. If you are playing this game with a terrier or hound type dog, stick to five repetitions or less.

Ping Pong

This game requires two people and one dog. Each person has a handful of treats. The two people walk across the room or across the yard and face each other. Then one begins by calling the dog and treating the dog when he reaches them. When the dog is finished chewing the second person calls the dog. Thus the dog runs from one person to the other ping-ponging across the area. This game is especially fun if you are in an outdoor area that is huge, football fields are ideal, then you can really get the dog running full speed. This is a great way to exercise your dog while also practicing the most important cue, coming when called.

Recall Set Up

This game was invented by Leslie Nelson. If you are having trouble with your dog's recall, you can play this game. In order to play you need:

- 2 people
- 2 dogs that get along with each other
- 2 leashes and collars
- Food treats that the dogs really want

Now the fun can begin. Set up the area as shown in the diagram below. For the purposes of the game the dog that needs to recall is Dog A and that dog's trainer is Person A. Person B and Dog B are helpers.

Person B

Dog A
on leash

Person A

Dog B
Tied to a tree

Person B is standing near Dog A who is on leash but it is left dragging on the ground. Person A is standing near Dog B who is tied to a tree. Person A calls Dog A ***one*** time. If the dog does not immediately recall, Person B steps on Dog A's leash. Now the opportunity to recall has ended and Person A goes and LOUDLY and LAVISHLY feeds treats to Dog B.

We have seen this set up work extremely well with terriers. In most cases all it took was ONE time and the dog perfectly recalled no matter what because she wasn't going to let Dog B get her treats!

The advanced version of this game is to give Person B a handful of boring treats. Person B feeds the boring treats to Dog A, when Person A calls the dog the feeding stops and the dog again has the opportunity to get the really good stuff that Person A has, IF they choose to recall. If not, Dog B, will be happy to eat some more treats.

Happy clicker training!