

Trudi Thorpe runs dogLOGIC Dog Training based in Sydney and specialises in Individual Behavioural Strategies, Puppy Pre-School and Adult Dog Classes. She is an AABP Professional Dog Trainer, Accredited Delta CGC Instructor, Accredited Delta CGC Assessor and a Certified Dog Behavioural Trainer. She is a member of the Delta Professional Dog Trainers Association, The Association of Animal Behaviour Professionals and the Association of Pet Dog Trainers.

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To begin training a reliable recall, start from home. Randomly call him to you using a different word, (if you have been using

'come', try 'here') and when he comes over, feed him a piece of his kibble. This is the beginning of conditioning that automatic recall response. It is a good idea to bring him right into you and calmly reach for his collar before releasing the kibble piece into his mouth.

This will get him used to you reaching for him when he comes in to you, and not staying just out of reach as you mentioned. I would be doing up to 20 of these a day – just randomly at different times. This particular exercise takes about 5 seconds to complete each time, so incorporate it into your life. Every time a commercial comes on television, call him into you. Every time you have a spare second, (or 5), call him in to you so that you have many opportunities to practise. Feed him EVERY SINGLE TIME.

Once you have a solid response in the house, take it outside and start to generalise it to other environments. Avoid the park that you have been going to, and if possible find an enclosed area that is quiet and without distraction, and repeat the training in that new environment using something of higher value like roast chicken. Only let him get a few feet away from you and then call him in. You need to reinforce with food 100% of the time that he comes in to you in order to cement the foundation of this exercise. Once solid at this level, up the ante and introduce a couple of distractions like one or two other dogs into the environment and repeat the exercise over and over.

A couple of beware: DON'T call him into you if you know that he's not going to come. Physically go up to him and call him from a shorter distance, using the chicken to motivate the right response. DON'T take him to the park where all of his friends are and expect that he is going to come in. DON'T fast-track the training or you will get inconsistent results. DON'T continually call him if he is not taking any notice of you, and DON'T ever get frustrated and angry once he has finally come in, because he will always associate your anger with the fact that he came in. All of these things will go toward diminishing the desired behaviour.

As for playing in the park with all his friends, I think it's important that he gets to continue to play with the dogs that he so enjoys being with, so maybe go a little later in the afternoon when the other owners are only half an hour from leaving, so that you're not stuck there for hours and it's a win, win.

Dear Trudi,

I am writing to you out of pure frustration at the fact that no matter what I do, my dog just refuses to come to me when I call him in the park! He is fine at home and is generally quite responsive and well behaved, it just seems that once he gets into the park with other dogs I completely cease to exist! I especially find this when we have been there for a reasonable amount of time and it's time to go home – it's almost like he knows it's time to go, and stays just out of reach so catching him is virtually impossible. I usually have to wait until the other owners are ready to leave or he is exhausted before I get him back, and this can take hours. I love taking him to play with other dogs, but it is getting increasingly harder to get him back to go home and I am now starting to get to the point where it's all too hard. Do you have some suggestions as to what I can do to help rectify this situation? **Thanks, Katie.**

Hi Katie,

Of all of the exercises we teach our dogs, recall, (or getting your dog to come back to you) is one of the trickiest, because if they don't want to do it, you can't make them! Teaching and maintaining a reliable recall isn't hard, it just takes time and a whole lot of patience. It's one of those exercises that you need to build slowly in order for it to be solid and successful. You need to train the recall first in order to use it in the park, and this is where a lot of people go wrong – they take the dog to the park and then just expect that the dog will understand what they want it to do.

The other thing to understand is that dogs learn by repetition and association, so whatever word you consistently put to a behaviour is the word that the dog will associate with that behaviour. So if your dog is playing with other dogs and you are calling 'COME,' then the word 'come' means continue playing with the other dogs because that's what he is doing when you consistently put the word to it! The other thing is that if you continually call your dog in to you and then clip it on lead and go home, the dog learns very quickly that coming in to your call means it's end of play and home time.

