

“THE LITTLE DEVIL JUST WON’T COME TO ME!!!” OR HOW TO TEACH YOUR PUPPY TO COME

Having trouble getting your dog to come when you call him? Does he come, but then darts away when you reach for him?

Some suggestions:

- ***NEVER call your puppy and either punish him or deliver any kind of negative when he arrives.***

If you need to discipline a pup, go to him rather than have him approach only to be scolded. Don't call him and give him his medication/clean his ears/clip his nails. If you need to perform these chores, call the pup, when he arrives take two minutes and play with him first. Make sure he associates his coming with the fun part, not the hygiene maintenance. Puppies have short memories, even a minute or two of play will suffice. If a puppy finds when he goes to his human, he is either punished, yelled at or receives any kind of negative result, he will decide, "well that settles it, I'm not going to them again!"

- ***Don't play the "catch me" game.***

This is a very common scenario. The dog secures a forbidden item in his mouth, flaunts it to his human and then runs away. The human predictably chases after the pup, making much noise running helplessly behind a fleet-footed canine. This creates an automatic response of when an owner approaches running, the dog will flee quickly in the opposite direction.

Puppy proof your house. What is the dog stealing? Make sure dangerous items are inaccessible. Don't participate. It takes two to play "catch me". Don't chase! Ignore him. Pick up one of his toys and begin to play loudly and enthusiastically with it. A curious puppy will drop the stolen item and go to see what all the fun is about.

Have a house line on your dog (only while under supervision of course). A thin nylon lead about six feet long is suggested. If your dog does get something he shouldn't, simply put your foot securely on the leash so the chase can't begin. Calmly remove the item from his mouth.

- ***Practice "come" without distractions. Use a high level food reward.***

Find a treat your pup thinks is irresistible. Semi-moist treats (like *Snausages*, small cheese squares, tiny bits of chicken weiner or *Rollover*) are a more powerful motivator than hard, baked dog treats. Boiled liver sprinkled with garlic powder is much more enticing than a piece of kibble. Your dog will take a split second and decide "come or go". He will be weighing the options. If you are offering a Milkbone versus chasing a squirrel, well which choice do you think he will make??

Start in a quiet, undistracted environment, possibly your kitchen or hallway. Call him unpredictably two or three times a day. Always use a happy, inviting tone. NEVER sound threatening or military with your vocal intonation when you are asking him to come. Squatting instead of standing when you call is a more welcoming body posture.

To start your training, make sure you have chosen a situation when he is certain to come. There is no use testing the response until you have taught it first. Don't be too far from the pup when you do call. You can always add distance as he becomes more reliable in his recalls.

When the puppy arrives, simultaneously bring both hands down towards him. One hand will deliver the tasty morsel to his mouth, as the other hand reaches behind his head and secures him by the collar. This will ensure your dog is comfortable with approaching hands, thereby preventing a "head shy" dog -- one that comes readily, but dodges away when you extend your hands toward him. He is not safe until you have your hand firmly in his collar.

If you would like to teach your puppy to come and sit in front of you be careful not to fall into the trap of nagging him when he reaches you – shouting "sit, sit, sit!" at a dog that has just left something very desirable only to be berated upon his arrival. As your puppy happily approaches, extend the hand with the treat towards his head and slowly guide his nose up, tilting his head slightly skyward, thereby creating a sit (head up, bum down). If you do this every time you call your dog, your command "come" will translate to your dog "move through space towards me, then sit upon arrival". There is no need to issue the "sit" command if you teach your puppy this sequence. To have a puppy perform a sit when he arrives is really an "extra". The most important goal is to teach the puppy to COME. Which would you rather have – a dog that came, didn't sit but allowed you to grab his collar or one that came, sat, couldn't be caught and got hit by a car?

Remember the ground rules: absolutely **no** negatives when the dog arrives and teach your dog how rewarding it can be to come to humans!