Recall Schedule

Teaching recall should be done as a set of well-structured and carefully managed steps. Even if the dog learns recall quickly, it's a good to prevent the habit of running away from ever developing. The sessions below are approximate steps but with recall particularly, it's important not to move onto the next step until the last is totally solid. If the dog learns to ignore your call this is a very difficult habit to undo.

1 Call your dog back whilst he is on the leash, take the collar or harness with one hand and reward with food. Repeat this process 5 times per session over 5 to 10 individual sessions. Practice on walks in a lot of different areas, with increasing distractions.

2 When your dog has the idea, practice recall in the garden off leash. Take hold of the collar or harness in the same way before delivering your treat.

3 Repeat step 1 with a dropped leash in areas of increasing distraction. The point when teaching recall is to keep your dog within the physical area of response. Imagine a circle of response around him and if he stays within that circle he will come when called but if he goes out of it, he is less likely to listen. At this stage, keep your dog within 1 metre of you. The circle will grow as your dog learns more.

4 Next, utilise a helper. Have someone hold your dog and show treat run. Take a few steps away and call your dog, after release take the dog's collar or harness and give the reward. Practice this 3-8 times a walk for 3 walks. Build up the distractions gradually.

5 When you feel confident that your dog comes when called, start creating a wider gap between you and your dog but always keep the circle of response in mind, call back regularly and reward for practice and build up in areas with higher levels of distraction.

Tips for success

Use things that motivate your dog to come back. The more motivated a dog is, the quicker they will learn. Squeaky toys, various treats and balls are all possibilities. Try to imagine your dog weighing up who is most rewarding when comparing you or the environment, it should always be you!

Always build distractions gradually at every step. If you start in an area where your dog is focussed on you, then add in gradual distractions at a reasonable level, you are naturally setting your dog up for recall success.

As your distance increases, learn to make yourself the most attractive option available. Use a loud, pleasing tone, open your body with big waving arms and make a real fuss when he comes back.

Always keep your voice positive and inviting. If your dog does not react to his name, try not to become frustrated or shout. If he doesn't recall to a happy voice, he certainly won't recall to an angry one.