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Name Response: Come When Called

Whether you just adopted a dog and want to give them a new name, or you are training your dog to come when called, follow these steps.

Days 1-3

These steps build a strong positive association between your dog’s name and the delivery of food. New Name = Food.

1. Count out 5 bits (about the size of a pencil eraser) of high value food.
2. Say your dog’s name.
3. Feed one piece of food.
4. Repeat 3 times per day for 3 days.

TIP: Try not to say your dog’s name outside of training at this stage. If you need to get their attention, try using rapid, high-pitched sounds like a kissy noise, clicking your tongue, or clapping your hands. When they turn and look, reward them - you can never have too many ways to get your dog’s attention.

Day 4

Now the real training starts! The goal at this stage is to reward your dog for looking at you when they hear their name.

Reward Marker: At this stage, you will use a word that tells your dog when they earned a food reward. This helps you capture the instant your dog responds, even if they aren’t near you.

1. Wait until your dog isn't looking at you, then say their name.
2. As soon as they turn their head toward you, say "Yes!"
3. Give them a food reward.

Practice these steps at home throughout the day. Pick times your dog is calm, not when they are excited or upset.

Tip: A reward marker is not the same as praise. You can still say “Good dog/girl/boy,” but if you don’t follow it with food every time, it won’t work as a reward marker.

Day 5-7

Practice the Day 4 exercise in a low-distraction area. This could be your yard or, if you are in an apartment, a quiet area of the parking lot or garage.

Day 8+

Practice in different places. If you say your dog’s name and don’t get a response, the distractions might be too hard for them this early in their training. Keep practicing!

Tips

* Always say “Yes” first, THEN show your dog the food. If your dog sees the food first, they will learn to respond ONLY when they see the treat. You have a few seconds to deliver the reward after you say “Yes,” so the treat doesn’t have to be in your hand first.
* If your dog loves to play with toys, you can also use those as rewards, in addition to food. Say your dog’s name, say “Yes!” when they respond, then get their FAVORITE tug or ball and have fun!
* Hide sealed containers of treats around your home. Practice these exercises, then pull out the secret treats. This teaches your dog that rewards come even when you don’t have treats in your hand.
* Only call your dog’s name when you think you have a 90% chance of a response. Otherwise, their name will quickly lose value.
* Slowly make the exercise harder. If you want your dog to respond around cats or critters, practice from far away first, then get closer over time.
* Use nicknames! Nicknames prevent overuse of your dog’s name and can be used as a more casual cue. My dog’s nickname is “Little” and I use it at home when I’m looking for him. I still reward it, but not with the same value or frequency as his name.

Common Mistakes

1. Going off-leash too soon. These exercises are only the first step of off-leash control. Don’t take your dog off-leash until they can respond to their name on-leash in a lot of places around many distractions.
2. Too hard, too soon. Just because your dog responds at home does not mean they’re ready to respond around bunnies or other dogs. Gradually make the distractions harder.
3. Stop rewarding the dog. A fast and reliable name response is a life-saving skill. Reward every time and with really good things so your dog responds when it really matters!

Off-Leash Recall

A solid name response is the first step to having a dog who responds off-leash. [Watch this video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1T1a3_1ouqY) on how to build an off-leash recall from start to finish.

Finally, if your dog behaves with fear or aggression towards people or dogs, they should never be off-leash in public areas. Visit www.IAABC.org to locate an expert in your area who can help.