



# The Underdog Training "So Your Dog" Series, Topic One

## So Your Dog- Doesn't come when called!

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We know that a reliable recall is important- your dog coming when called could be the difference between them staying safe or being in danger! While most people prioritise teaching a reliable recall, many struggle with achieving success. Although a seemingly simple exercise, the recall can be the most difficult to teach- the good news is, it doesn't have to be any longer!

### So why does teaching a recall seem more difficult than teaching other obedience exercises?

- The environment is too distracting for the dogs level of training
- The dog is provided with opportunities to self-reward- running away to play with dogs or other people for example
- Frustration and high levels of excitement are reinforced- the dog pulls on the lead all the way to the park and is immediately let off lead
- Lack of conditioning- the dog doesn't have any association with the command being used
- Dog desensitised to owners repeated commands
- Dogs are socialised in a way that develops a high value for other dogs- large amounts of uncontrolled, high energy play with other dogs tends to create problems with the development of a recall command
- Breed instincts not in line with a natural reliable recall- some dogs find it more difficult, often those that have been bred to work independently of people or who are extremely sociable.
- Limited access to off lead areas
- Less exercise provided than required

**What is Classical Conditioning?** Classical conditioning is a pairing exercise where something that is initially neutral to the dog, is paired with something the dog naturally finds appealing- such as food. So for example, when you pair a food bowl with food a number of times, the dog becomes excited at the presence of the food bowl- even if there is no food currently in it. Imagine if you could get that type of response to a recall command! The good news is, you can!

**What if my dog is not motivated by food or toys?** Every dog is motivated by food- they can't survive without it! However, for those dogs who are not motivated enough to want food additional to their meals, you may want to use their meals during training for the time being. Special drive rewards can also be used for some dogs- rabbit fur tugs, raccoons tail toys etc.- these are particularly beneficial for prey driven dogs who want to go chasing rabbits instead of returning to you!

**Is my dog too old for this kind of training?** No dog is ever too old! However, if the dog has been practicing the behaviour for a long period of time, the conditioning process will take a little longer or require more repetitions than if you were to start with an 8 week old puppy.

### The 10 Step Program for Teaching the Elusive- Reliable Recalls

1. **Prevent** the dog from self-rewarding when running away. This may mean putting the dog on a long line in the park or walking the dog more on lead during the training process. Care should be taken to ensure the dogs exercise level does not decrease during this time.
2. **Find** the dog's motivator- food or a toy will generally be needed and both should be utilised where possible. Deprivation schedules may be needed to increase value for the motivator in the early stages of training.
3. **Choose** a recall word that has not been tainted before to use for the 100% reliable recall- this will be your emergency recall. The dog's name (or another word if you would prefer) will also be used for the training process. This method develops one informal recall (to be used regularly) and one formal recall (to be used less frequently) which is to be absolutely reliable.
4. **The Name Game-** Calling the dogs name ONCE only, when the dog makes eye contact, mark with either the word "yes" or a clicker and immediately food reward. This exercise should be repeated at least 25 times per day. For those wanting quicker or more reliable results, increase the number of repetitions of the exercise. Continue the Name Game throughout the remaining 6 steps of the Reliable Recall program but you may decrease the number of repetitions to 10 after the first 2 weeks.
5. **The Emergency Recall-** After a few days of the Name Game only start to condition (pair with food) the Emergency recall at home. Remember to use the word only once and deliver the reward regardless of what the dog does.
6. **Gradually increase** the level of distraction. Only move to a new level of distraction when the dog has done 5 repetitions where they immediately turned their head upon hearing their ER word.
7. **Start to move** locations in and around the home (particularly around the front door if the dog would tend to race out the door previously)
8. **Play hide and seek** within the house, using the ER once and providing the dog with a jackpot reward when they find you. Make it easy to begin with and gradually increase the level of difficulty- this encourages the dog to be persistent and builds frustration. Building frustration often helps to increase the speed of a recall. The faster the recall, the more reliable it is likely to be. Puppy in the Middle is also a valuable game to play with any dog learning to recall but does require 2 handlers.
9. **With the dog on lead** begin using the ER on walks and in other distracting situations. Remember to reinforce EVERY time the ER word is used. Jackpot rewards can be used for the exceptional responses from the dog.
10. **In outside environments**, begin to increase the distance away from the dog. When increasing distance, start with low level distractions and gradually increase. Distraction, duration and distance should be gradually increased- but care should be taken to separate these to start with.

**The information provided in the So Your Dog Series is general in nature. We recommend seeing a qualified dog trainer and having a veterinary examination completed for the best results in resolving your dogs problems. For further information or training options, go to [www.underdogtraining.com.au](http://www.underdogtraining.com.au)**