Training, Teaching 'Come' Command

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

For the safety of your puppy... the 'come' command is the most important command to teach.

The goal in teaching the 'come' command is to have a well disciplined dog that can always be brought to your side regardless of the situation. This is as much for your dog's safety and protection as it is for your convenience.

This method of teaching 'come' to a puppy involves the use of a collar and a long leash or check cord. However, your puppy needs to become adjusted to the sensation of the collar and the effect of the leash. Do not start training until this is done. We prefer a leash or cord that is at least 15 ft. long. Also, choose a training time when there are no distractions.

Stand with the pup several feet from you and gently pull him toward you with the cord. As he reaches you, give praise by gently reaching down to pet him, rubbing him across the shoulders a few times. It may also help to kneel down in a crouched position to encourage the pup to come to you.

You don't need to say anything at all yet because saying 'come' will just be confusing to the pup at this point. In all training, we believe that a dog should know and understand the action demanded of a command before you ever add human language to it. Dogs don't understand our words. They can be taught to understand but it is not a natural or instinctive process for them. Repeat the pulling-in and praise a few more times. The first lesson should only be a few minutes long; a pup's attention span is short and we want the lessons to be a fun time between pup and owner.

After a few sessions, you will notice that the puppy comes easier and easier until the slightest tug on the cord starts the pup right toward you. This is exactly what we want. Giving treats is not necessary, but since this is such a difficult command for some dogs to learn, it may assist in training.

Once you are confident that the pup will start coming to you with the slightest pull on the cord, say 'come' at the same instant you start to pull on the cord. Just say it once and don't repeat yourself. Do not raise your voice. The pup will soon associate the action of 'come' with the verbal command. Repeat this process until the cord, although still attached to the collar, plays no part in bringing the puppy to you. Rather, the pup comes on his own as a response to the verbal command. At this point in the training, the cord can be removed. Working in a controlled area, the command can be given and the correct behavior rewarded with mild praise. There will be instances when the pup challenges your authority. Then it is time to go back to using the check cord for a period of time to refresh and remind your pup.

Be careful how you use spoken commands around your pup. For example, the pup probably won't even hear you as he runs across the neighbor's yard, playing with another dog. Screaming 'come-come-come' at a time like this only tells a pup that he can get away with disobeying your commands. Use common sense when using the command and make sure the puppy always obeys. Also be sure that all family members use the same word for the same command. One person can't be saying 'here,' another saying 'come here Ralph,' and yet another 'over here' and expect the puppy to understand and obey.

'Come' is the most important command you'll ever teach your dog. It could save your dog's life. You and everyone around you will appreciate a dog that is obedient and under control.

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