

5. Recall

Both in training and after qualification, poor recall is a serious but not insurmountable problem. In dealing with it, one needs initially to look at the reasons for the problem – has the recall broken down or was it never well established in the first place?

A dog will not usually come back when there is something more interesting for him/her to see or do. Therefore, the handler must overcome such distractions by his/her own personality and by consistent and accurate use of praise and correction.

A dog needs to be trained to return to you and, as with any other exercise, if he/she fails to respond, retraining should begin at the earliest opportunity.

Solutions to Poor Recall

Put the dog on a long lead or line and walk away as far as this will allow. It does not matter what position the dog is left in but, before leaving the dog, it is a good idea to show it you have some material reward with you (e.g., dried kibbles).

Call the dog by using a combination of voice and whistle. If the dog hesitates, give a sharp jerk on the lead and use a harsh, demanding voice. As soon as the dog responds and comes to you, give praise and the food reward. Repeat this exercise several times.

When you next allow your dog to run free, do so in an enclosed area where there is less chance of escape should your dog not respond to your previous training. The food reward may be gradually reduced in frequency once a good recall has been established. Should any sign of a breakdown be seen, immediately repeat the sequence outlined above.

It is important that the dog should not only enjoy returning to you but also feel a sense of urgency – hence the use of the lead to prompt a fast response. The whistle can also be used at other times. A good example is when feeding the dog. Place the dog in another part of the house, put the bowl of food on the kitchen floor, and blow the whistle for the dog to come. What better incentive!

Please note that regular or excessive free running can adversely affect some dogs' work as it leads to anticipation, excitability, and self-interest. If you have any worries about the effects of free running on your dog's behavior, please contact GDTx.

Other Tips to Improve Recall

Try to either stand up straight or simply crouch down when the dog is returning. Do not bend over and reach out for the animal, as this presents a grab, which can put the dog off from returning to you.

Try to keep your hands free of harnesses and leads, as this can also discourage the dog.

If possible, avoid free running only in one place. In an unfamiliar place, the dog feels insecure and will always keep its handler in sight. For these reasons, it is also advantageous to keep moving rather than always remaining in the same spot.

Guide Dog Owner Information Booklet

Never scold your dog when it returns to you voluntarily, even if you have waited several hours! Grit your teeth and give him/her a reward. Punishing your dog on such occasions could lead it to become frightened of you and so take longer to return next time. Allow the dog to go several times before finally putting him/her back on the lead. If the dog happens to wander back to you without being asked, acknowledge the fact with some praise. It is permissible to get your dog to retrieve articles as a means of encouraging him/her to return to you, but avoid using balls as these can lodge in the dog's throat and choke him/her. Also, it is inadvisable to throw sticks, which can cause severe injury. Always remove the check chain before free running, and replace it with the leather collar.

In conclusion, remember always to be consistent, use the whistle, and do not hesitate to return to basics to retrain your dog if the recall breaks down.