

How to Teach Your Puppy to Come to You

By Brenda Howard

When you get your sweet new puppy buy him a collar. The collar is an important tool for training your puppy. Some pups are quite startled by the feel of a collar and may balk at it. Remember that the collar is not causing any pain and your puppy is just fine. Once he's used to the feel of the collar you can add to the equation the feel of a leash or lead. An easy way to do this is to simply clip the leash to the collar and let the puppy pull the leash around by himself. SOME puppies will stop like a stone if you try to lead them with a leash the first time and others may flop like a fish on a line. I you are certain that the pup is in no pain, let him work this out for himself.

Once the collar and leash are accepted you can begin to teach some very basic heeling and recall skills.

Does this sound familiar?

You call to your sweet 8 week old puppy, "Here pup, pup,pup," and because he loves you and is excited by your presence, he comes bounding to you. And for a while this works every time. What a smart puppy!

Then one day when he's between 4 to 8 months age, he will look at you when you call and you can almost see the wheels of his brain spin...he's thinking – yep there's that great guy who gives me food and belly rubs, but I really would rather go inspect that dandelion. And in that instant he learns that he doesn't have to come to you when you call. Bummer! He really IS a smart pup!

OR you call the puppy to you and you place him on your lap and begin to cut his nails. He decides you are trying to torture him and he remembers this the next time you call – in the same way you remember to avoid a hot stove after you have touched it once. You didn't intend to cause a problem, but a problem is what you now have.

Always Make Coming To You Wonderful

To avoid these common mistakes always remember and never forget to give your puppy a treat – a tasty special food treat every time he comes to you when you call. EVERY time you call him to you give him a treat and tell him "Good Boy!" This is called positive reinforcement. You are reinforcing in a very positive way for the puppy the good behavior you requested.

Once your puppy has reached the critical development phase between 4 and 8 months of age, you will call him to you ONLY when you can control the outcome. This means that you will only call him to you if he is wearing his collar and is on a leash. If you call him and he blows you off, you will gently but firmly reel him in on the leash. When he is directly in front of

you praise him and give him a treat. You can offer a favorite toy or a new toy or make squeaky silly noises – just make coming to you more rewarding and exciting than inspecting the rest of the world around him. By using the leash you can guarantee that the pup will successfully come to you – he won't be allowed to make the mistake of not coming. This is not done in a punishing way – you are helping the puppy to succeed.

The second part of the puzzle is to always remember and never forget to go pick the puppy up if you need to do anything with him that the puppy perceives to be a negative or something the puppy doesn't like. Baths and nail trimming come to mind. Likewise do not call the puppy to you and then scold or punish him. He is a smart puppy and will learn quickly not to come to you when called.

The obedience skill of "recall" is one that most competitive obedience dogs are worked on continually and consistently for their entire lives. That lovely obedience demonstration you saw on TV was the result of years of work by the dog and handler. But you too can have a dog that wants to come to you when called if you work a little on the skill each day and avoid the missteps that will hinder your puppy's progress.

Brenda Howard has been training dogs for over 20 years and is a member of The Association of Pet Dog Trainers, The American Bloodhound Club, and The American Boarding Kennels Association. Brenda and her husband, Walt Partin, are owners of BlooMoon Pet Resort LP.

