

Food Rewards for Recall Training

These guidelines are for all puppies undergoing a food induced recall training program. Raisers of puppies and dogs put on a Food Protocol for distractions, or lack of confidence, should refer to their leader and Community Field Representative (CFR) for appropriate instruction on that method.

Food reward based training is very successful but consideration must be given to a guide puppy's future responsibilities when utilizing this method. Everything possible must be done to prevent the puppy being distracted by food. Raisers may have to work harder on exercises to ensure that the puppy does not assume that it can take food from any human hand, and to prevent scavenging off the floor. If done correctly, the guide puppy trained with food should be well mannered in the presence of food and understand that it may only accept food from the hand in specific circumstances.

The Puppy Raising Manual update section covers the specifics of what, where and when to give the food reward. Those instructions should be read over before commencing with every step in the recall training. If the raiser is concerned with the puppy's interest in food or sees an increase in food-distracted behaviors, the leader and CFR should be consulted.

Puppies should take the food gently when offered. If the puppy is grabbing the food offering the kibble from a cupped palm rather than between finger and thumb will help. The raiser may hold the food in a tight fist and slowly open the hand to present the food. Puppies who insist on snatching at the food will benefit from further work on how to take food appropriately; the CFR should be consulted on methods to teach the puppy to accept food in a reasonable manner.

Puppies must not be allowed to eat dropped food off the floor:

- If food is accidentally dropped, the handler should step away from the food as quickly as possible drawing the puppy by the leash or collar and walking backwards. In most cases of dropped kibble, the raiser will already be holding onto the puppy's collar, making control simple.
- While the raiser holds onto the collar with one hand the other hand can reach behind into the pouch for another piece of food to offer to the puppy.
- The puppy must not be lured away from the dropped food by the raiser waving another piece of food at it. The new piece of kibble is given from between the knees as the puppy is being praised for coming away from the dropped food.
- It is wise to step at least 6 feet away from the dropped food before rewarding to prevent the puppy from darting back to the dropped food.
- The dropped piece of food should either be picked up by an assistant or the handler should pick it up and place it back in the pouch. *The handler must never offer the piece of dropped food directly to the puppy.*

Bait bags should be made out of cloth or leather and have a way to close them. A simple pouch, with a Velcro closure and clip to attach to the belt or waistband, is an acceptable alternative to a commercially available bait bag. Pockets and plastic or paper bags are not alternatives to a bait bag or fanny pack. It is preferable that the bait bag is loaded and attached behind the raiser's waistband before getting the puppy out to work it. We don't want the bait bag to become a cue to the puppy.

Raisers should be aware that the bait bag will become a focal point for the puppy if care is not taken in its handling. It should be stored well out of the puppy's reach and sight when not in use.

The food induced recall is going to greatly increase the success of our puppies in learning the 'Come' command and should be of tremendous help in preventing 'keep away' issues. With these guidelines any negative effects of working with food rewards should be minimal and vastly outnumbered by the positive effects that food reward training brings. However, the success of the program depends on the commitment of leaders and raisers to implement it. If a puppy's behavior is deteriorating due to food distractions the leader or CFR should be consulted as soon as possible. Early intervention is the key; the CFR can help get the puppy on the right track and make this program successful and enjoyable for raisers and puppies alike.

Puppy Raising Manual Update: "Come" Command Section 6-3: Training Technique, Commands; pages 6-48 through 6-53

'Come' (The Recall)

Appropriate Age: The food induced recall should begin as soon as you get your puppy. He should advance quickly through 'on-leash food induced recall phase 1' at 8 to 10 weeks; on-leash food induced recall phase 2 at 9 weeks to 4 months; 'two handler food induced recall' at 10 weeks to 5 months; 'long-line food induced recall' at 4 months to 12 months and 'off-leash food induced recall' at 5 months to 12 months. Puppies will vary in their response and it is important not to proceed until each step is successfully accomplished.

Purpose:

It is easy to appreciate how important a reliable recall is to someone that is visually impaired; at any time, under many different circumstances, it may be necessary to call a Guide Dog and know that it will come. Remember that a visually impaired person may not be able to see if the dog is responding to the command to come. It can even be a safety matter for both dog and handler. This may be the most important exercise your puppy will learn. The use of food to motivate your puppy to come to you will not only make teaching this command more successful but it will also help in avoiding 'keep away' issues as he matures.

Objective:

Your puppy will reliably and happily come directly to you when called, even with distractions. The puppy should come close enough for the handler to hold the collar, and it is desirable for the puppy to gently touch (but not crash into or jump on) the handler.

Equipment:

- Flat collar or training collar; *this exercise is never taught on a headcollar.*
- Six foot leash initially. Long lines and drag lines later.
- Bait bag or fanny pack that can be attached at the handler's back waistband.
- A portion of your puppy's regular kibble.

Procedure:

Universal do's and don'ts when teaching the recall.

- Do use a calm, pleasant and friendly tone of voice at all times.
- Do move calmly and slowly when you need to approach your puppy.
- Do use enthusiastic verbal and physical praise when appropriate.
- Do praise your puppy for coming to you, even if you were going to him to correct him.
- Do reach for your puppy's collar and praise every time he approaches you. This conditions your puppy to expect a hand reaching towards him and creates a positive association with an outstretched hand.
- Do not bribe your puppy by waving food at him
- Do not call your puppy to you to correct or discipline him.
- Do not run after, lunge for or grab at your puppy.
- Do not call your puppy to you when you are going to do something he may not like, such as baths or nail clipping.

Don't use the word 'Come' unless your puppy is coming to you anyway, or you have a leash or line attached to cause him to come to you. For daily off leash handling of your puppy use his name, 'puppy, puppy', 'this way' or other motivational words to bring the pup to you. Until your puppy has completed all the steps successfully, the come response is 'trained' only when he is on leash or a line and you are prepared with food rewards.

Use of Food in the Recall

It is important that whenever you give your puppy a food reward he receives lots of verbal and physical praise (petting) just before and during the reward; we want him to associate the praise with food rewards. The food reinforces the verbal and physical praise.

Your puppy's regular kibble is the only approved food to use on this exercise. If your puppy is not motivated by his dog food you must talk to your Leader; he or she will then consult with the Puppy Raising Advisor for advice.

You must take a portion of your puppy's daily ration to use for training. This way you can ensure he is not getting too much food.

While training, the food must be on your person, out of sight of the puppy. A fanny pack or pouch attached behind you works well. Food may not be stored in pockets. Rustling plastic bags can create a distraction and should not be used.

Your puppy should only receive one kibble at a time. The kibble should be held between first finger and thumb or cupped in the palm of your hand when offering to the puppy.

Great care must be taken to ensure the puppy only takes food from your hand. He must be prevented from getting dropped food off the ground.

The food reward is given from one hand while your other hand holds your puppy's collar. As the food is brought to the puppy's mouth the collar must be held onto. This

prevents your puppy from leaving as soon as he gets the food and also prevents him from getting dropped food off the floor.

The food reward is held between your legs, at knee level or lower depending on the size of your puppy, so that he must put his head through your legs to reach the food. This encourages your puppy to make body contact and makes it easy for you to take his collar.

The food reward is brought to the puppy from out of site where it is hidden in a back pocket or fanny pack. The only exception to this is in the very beginning stages (see below) when the puppy may be lured with a single piece of kibble in the hand.

Initiating Taking Food From the Hand.

This exercise is only done the very first time you introduce your puppy to the food induced recall. Some puppies have difficulty accepting food from the hand and must be shown how to take and eat the piece of kibble.

Your puppy must be on leash when you introduce the food. Hold his collar with one hand (to prevent him from eating dropped food off the floor). Hold one piece of kibble between finger and thumb in the other hand and put it right in front of the puppy's nose, let him smell it. Praise him when he does and encourage him with your voice to take the food. He may fumble with his mouth, not sure how to get the food. Gently help him take the food. Be prepared for him to drop the food a time or two. Lure him away from dropped food with another piece of kibble.

Some puppies may find it easier to eat the piece of food out of your cupped palm. Try both ways and see what works best for your puppy.

Repeat several times until your puppy gets the idea of taking a piece of kibble from your hand and eating it. It will only take a minute for him to get the idea then you can move on to the recall.

If your puppy grabs your fingers or snatches the food with his teeth, scraping your hand, speak to your leader or advisor about methods to teach him to take food gently.

On-leash Come phase 1

Do this exercise twice a day for approximately 5 days. In this phase the food is used as a lure to show your puppy what you want. It is important to dispense with the lure technique as soon as possible and move on to phase 2. Most puppies will move through this first step quickly and easily.

- Work this exercise with your puppy on-leash. At first you may have to call your puppy from very close to you, i.e., half a leash length away.
- Have a piece of kibble ready in your hand.
- Begin in a familiar area with no distractions. Allow your puppy to wander and his attention to drift. When your puppy is no longer paying attention to you, say the puppy's name (to help regain his attention) and give the command '**Come**'. Say the command one time only, and use a happy tone of voice.

- If your puppy begins to move toward you when the command is given, praise immediately. If he does not respond immediately he should be lightly guided toward you with the leash.
- Walking backwards while praising your puppy enthusiastically will encourage him to keep moving towards you.
- Continue to praise as he gets close to you and hold the piece of kibble in front of his nose, at his level so that he doesn't jump up. Draw him between your ankles or knees, depending on the size of the puppy, with the kibble and calmly grasp his collar with your free hand as he eats the food.
- Keep praising him verbally and pet him for allowing you to hold onto his collar.
- Release the puppy from the exercise with an 'OK', and allow him to again drift away from you.
- Repeat this exercise several more times. Don't work your puppy for more than a few minutes at a time.

On-leash Come phase 2

Now your puppy understands he is going to get a food reward for coming to you. From now on you need to physically praise your puppy by petting him for a count of ten seconds before reaching into your bait bag behind you and giving him a piece of kibble. The verbal and physical praise will be reinforced with the food reward.

- Call your puppy with his name and the command 'Come'.
- Gently guide your puppy toward you with his leash if he does not respond.
- Praise verbally as soon as he responds and walk backwards encouraging him toward you.
- Calmly take hold of his collar with one hand and pet him with the other hand for ten seconds, continue to verbally praise him.
- After ten seconds of petting, keep hold of the collar with one hand and give your puppy a food reward; reach into your pouch and lower one kibble between your ankles/knees to give to him. Praise him as he is eating the kibble then release with an 'OK'.
- As your puppy becomes familiar with the command, begin to add distractions when training. Start with minor distractions.
- When your puppy comes reliably (no leash guidance needed) when on-leash with minor distractions, begin using more distracting situations. If your puppy has difficulty bringing his attention back to you then you are making the situation too difficult for him - reduce the level of distraction so that he can be successful.

Two handler Come

This exercise teaches the puppy that he must come to anyone that calls him. It is done on-leash/line with the handlers about six to ten feet apart. Both handlers should have a supply of kibble in a fanny pack or bait bag attached behind them.

- Handler 'A' should hold the puppy on the ground, facing Handler 'B'. Handler 'A' should not pay any attention to the pup; Handler 'B' holds the leash.
- Handler 'B' calls the puppy as described in the 'on-leash recall'. When the puppy gets to Handler 'B' he is given a food reward in the manner described above in phase 2.
- The leash is quietly handed to Handler 'A' as the puppy is being praised and petted by the person who called him. After praising and rewarding the puppy for coming Handler 'B' becomes calm and uninteresting to the puppy thus making it easier for Handler 'A' to get the puppy's attention.

- Handler 'B' stops the praise and play and faces the puppy toward Handler 'A'.
- Handler 'A' then calls the puppy, repeating the exercise. Four or five repetitions are sufficient.
- As the puppy progresses, the handler holding the puppy does not need to face the puppy towards the other handler, and may eventually keep playing with the puppy as a distraction.
- As in the on-leash recall, if the puppy fails to respond to the command 'come' he should be guided by the leash to the person who called him.
- Two leashes may be attached to the pup's collar so that the handlers do not have to pass the leash back and forth.
- Never use the puppy as a 'yo-yo'. Allow the puppy time to be adequately praised by each person participating in the exercise.

Before moving to the next step:

At this point in training the 'Come' command the food is never visible to your puppy. It is preferable that your puppy is called, praised and held by the collar in front of the you, as close as possible, while you reach around to your supply and take out a piece of food. Remember to feed him low down between your legs.

If your puppy is relying on the leash to guide him to you and not responding to your voice cue alone you need to look at *why* he is not responding:

- Are you making the situation too distracting and not being fair to your puppy?
- Is your voice tone wrong or perhaps you are not using enough verbal praise?
- Is the kibble not motivating your puppy, perhaps he would respond better to a toy reward or higher value food? (Consult with your leader.)
- Perhaps your puppy is ready for more of a leash pop correction than a gentle guide. If you are sure your puppy understands what is required, and the situation is not too difficult for him, a leash correction may be warranted but should always be followed with lots of praise and a food reward.

Sometimes, when your puppy has worked through a particularly difficult training session, maybe being called away from an exceptionally hard distraction, he deserves a 'jackpot'. A jackpot reward is multiple pieces of kibble given all at once and is a huge motivator. Five to six pieces of kibble are sufficient for a jackpot. The jackpot should not be overused or it will lose its value to the puppy. Keep the jackpot reward for those special times when he really deserves it.

Long-line Recall.

- Do not begin this exercise until your puppy does a reliable on-leash recall, with distractions, by coming toward you on the first command without needing any leash guidance.
- Raisers who are not familiar with the use of a long-line should receive instruction from their leader before attempting this exercise.
- The long-line should be 15 to 25 feet in length. It may be a rope, nylon-leash material, or a retractable leash designed for this purpose. When using some types of rope or leash material, it may be advisable to use gloves to prevent rope burn.

- Begin in an area with no distractions. Allow your puppy to wander and his attention to drift. Do not allow your puppy to put too much slack in the line - this will cause you to lose control of it.
- When your puppy is no longer paying attention to you, say his name (to help regain attention) and give the command '**Come**'. Say the command one time only, and use a happy tone of voice.
- If your puppy responds and begins to move toward you, praise enthusiastically. Continue to praise as your puppy moves toward you. Backing away from your puppy will encourage him to come towards you and will also make it easier for you to gather the long-line. Once he reaches you, take his collar and praise and pet him for a count of ten seconds. Continue holding his collar and verbally praising while you reach behind you for a kibble. Give him the food low between your legs and pet him as you continue to hold his collar. Release him with an 'OK' when you are ready.
- If your puppy does not respond to the command, or if he responds initially and then loses his focus and drifts away, give a pop-and-release collar correction. To accomplish this, you must reel in excess line as the puppy approaches. (A 'Flexi-lead' retractable leash will do this automatically.) As he focuses on you and moves in your direction, verbally praise.
- When your puppy reaches you, complete the exercise as with the on-leash come.
- When your puppy is consistently responding and coming all the way to you with no leash guidance, introduce minor distractions. As your puppy succeeds with minor distractions, gradually increase the level of distraction.

Random Reinforcement:

At this point in training the recall you should introduce 'random reinforcement'. What this means, briefly, is that your puppy does not get a food reward every single time he comes to you; it becomes random. You will still praise and pet your puppy every time, taking hold of his collar and using stroking and patting to reward him. You may reward him with a piece of food on the second or third recall or do four recalls with no food reward then give him a 'jackpot'. If you see your puppy's response diminishing consult with your leader, perhaps you introduced random reinforcement too soon or your puppy is one of those that will have to be weaned off regular rewards more carefully. Your puppy should still receive multiple food rewards in each training session even when on a schedule of random reinforcement. It is not necessary to wean him off food rewards totally.

After weeks of consistent responses on the long line, with random reinforcement, your puppy is ready for the next step.

Transition to off-leash recall.

Go back to food rewards every single time as you work through the transition to the off-leash recall. Only when he responds to your command immediately, every time you call him, should you go to random reinforcement for the off-leash recall.

- The transition from an on-leash recall must be done gradually. If the leash or line is taken off too soon your pup will quickly realize he does not have to respond to you. This can lead to bad habits, like games of 'keep away'. Even while having some free time in the back yard, your pup should have a dragline on, so that you can take hold of it before calling him. Remember; never give a command you cannot enforce.

- In a safe, enclosed area, drop the long-line attached to your puppy's collar, and let him drag it. Call him to you in a happy tone and praise immediately when he starts toward you. Do not step toward your puppy but back away and encourage him to come to you. When he comes to you take hold of his collar, pet and praise for ten seconds, then give a food reward as above.
- If your puppy does not respond to your command, quietly and smoothly pick up the line and guide him to you. Praise and reward as above.
- If your puppy is not coming when called with the line dragging, he may need more exercise with the hand-held line or there may be too many distractions, making the situation too difficult for his level of training. Sometimes a distraction is more motivating to the puppy than the food, so you have to go back to the hand held line and work harder to keep his interest.
- When your puppy is coming every single time he is called while dragging his long-line, without needing a correction, he can be transitioned to a shorter dragline. (You may just want to cut off a portion of his long-line to make it shorter, or you may have several lines of varying lengths available.)
- Over a period of weeks, the attached line is gradually shortened until it is just a 'tab' or handle, hanging from his collar.
- Do not hesitate to go back to a longer, hand-held line and do more exercises if the puppy is not responding consistently to the command. Your puppy must be conditioned to respond correctly with gradually increased distraction. The line will enable you to enforce the command and the praise and food rewards will keep him motivated.
- If at any time your puppy shows signs of playing 'keep away' go back to the long-line and more frequent food rewards. Consult your leader if you are not getting a good, consistent response from your puppy.

Off-leash recall

Do not begin this exercise until your puppy comes when called with just a shortened dragline or tab attached to his collar. He must be responding to the first command '**Come**', without a correction, even with distractions. If he is not doing this he needs more work on the long-line and dragline.

- Begin this exercise in a small, escape-proof, confined area (such as an exercise pen) or room with no distractions. Allow your puppy to wander and become interested in something. The room should be free of obstacles and small enough so that your puppy cannot avoid you.
- Say your puppy's name followed by the command '**Come**'.
- Expect your puppy to respond to the command within one second. When your puppy moves toward you, begin to praise. Once your puppy reaches you, calmly take hold of his collar, pet and praise your puppy for ten seconds, then, still holding onto his collar, reach into your supply of food and give him a kibble, holding it low down, between your knees. Repeat the exercise.
- If your puppy does not respond within one second to the command, do not repeat the command. Walk calmly and slowly toward your puppy. When you reach him, slowly take hold of his collar. Praise your puppy for allowing his collar to be held. Say '**Come**', hold the collar and walk backwards to the area where you first called your puppy. Praise your puppy as you walk backwards and when you reach the area where you originally called him pet him for ten seconds *but do not give him a food reward*. Release your pup with an 'OK'. Walk away and allow the pup to become slightly

distracted before repeating the exercise. Make it easier for him this time to give him a chance to succeed; stay closer if necessary.

- It is important that you not rush toward your puppy or grab at the collar. Rushing or lunging towards your puppy will usually have one of two effects: the puppy will become worried or threatened by the handler, or; the puppy will initiate the keep-away game. Both of these are undesirable responses. If your puppy avoids you or plays keep-away as you approach, walk even more slowly and calmly toward him. Keep a calm, happy demeanor. Approaching slowly will take time, but it is the only way to teach your puppy not to avoid you. No matter how long it takes to get hold of the puppy's collar, enthusiastic praise is necessary when you do touch it. Obviously keeping the training area small makes this exercise easier.
- Never use a corrective, angry or threatening tone of voice when training this exercise (no matter how exasperated you may be). Harsh commands will make your puppy worried about approaching you. Praise really enthusiastically and encourage your puppy by moving away from him, drawing him towards you at the first sign that he is responding to your command.
- If you do not achieve success after two attempts, go back to the long-line technique for a while longer.
- Once the puppy is consistently coming when called, add minor distractions. Slowly increase both the distraction levels and room or enclosure size.
- You will need to train your puppy in this exercise throughout the time you have him. It is not necessary to totally wean him off the food rewards. You should randomly reinforce your puppy with food rewards throughout the time he is with you. Remember random reinforcement is not predictable; there is no pattern to it. If you see a waning in his response to the recall command you may have to use the food reward more often. You should verbally and physically praise him every time he comes to you. Don't be afraid to go back to any step in this process and reinforce it.

Summary:

- A reliable recall response is a vital part of a Guide Dog's training. Raisers can succeed in teaching this command with patient, calm, friendly and consistent handling technique. Throughout the puppy's maturation, there will be times that the '**Come**' command will need reinforcement. When a puppy fails to respond under conditions in which there had previously been no problems, the pup may need to go back to remedial leash or line work. We would prefer that the off-leash recall is not attempted at all rather than have a dog come into training playing keep-away games. The use of food reward should greatly increase the raiser's success in teaching this command.