

Come

Come can be an easy cue to teach your puppy and should be turned into a game to make it fun. Teaching your puppy to *come* on cue will protect him from danger throughout his life. There are two important rules to consider when training the cue *come*:

1. Never scold your puppy when he has come to you, no matter how slowly he comes.
2. Never call your puppy by his name when you will be doing something he may not enjoy, such as giving him medication or giving him a bath.

There are a couple of different options for training the cue *come*. In the first option, when your puppy is lying down quietly, show him a tasty treat in your hand (**lure**) and walk about three feet away from him. In a **happy voice**, say his name and the word “Come” (**cue**). The second he takes his first step toward you, quickly **mark** the forward movement with a word like “Yes” or a click from your clicker. Encourage him to come over to you to get the tasty lure. When he does, quickly mark his forward movement and reward him with the treat when he reaches you. Give him some **special attention** by playing with and rubbing him, and tell him he was a good boy in a pleasant and happy voice.

Later on in the day, when he is lying down comfortably, repeat the exercise. Show him the treat, say his name in a happy voice, and give the verbal cue “Come.” Remember to mark his forward movement **immediately**, and give him the treat when he gets to you. Repeat this exercise several times a day for the next few days.

Once your puppy is coming to you consistently on cue, you will want to do away with the lure (showing him the treat), and replace it with the reward (not showing him the treat). (For more information about the difference between lures and rewards, ask your Patient Behaviour Advocate (nurse/vet) for the **Lures and Rewards hand-out**.) To accomplish this cue without a lure, begin with your hands in the same position as they were when you showed him the treat, but do not have a treat in your hand. Use his name first then give him the cue “Come” in a happy voice. Mark the immediate forward movement with a word or a click, and give him a **jackpot of treats** as his reward when he reaches you. After he has successfully *come* on cue three or four times, you can begin to extend the distance between the two of you.

As part of the second option, if you have more than one person in your home, you can play monkey (puppy)-in-the-middle. Have two people stand a few feet apart and take turns calling him. Both people should have many small treats to offer him as the reward for coming. For the first two or three times playing this game, use the reward as a lure until the puppy gets the hang of the game and comes quickly to the person who calls him. The person who calls the puppy should use a happy voice when saying his name along with the cue “Come.” The person who is not calling him should stand up straight and ignore him. Once he has successfully come to both people a few times in a row, extend the distance between the two people a few steps at a time. In the beginning, it is okay to show him the lure treat, but as time goes on, it is important to turn the lure into the reward and hide the treat. In the future, you do not want him visibly checking out your hands from a distance to see if you

have a treat before he is willing to come to you. Before you know it, he will be flying back and forth between the two of you and having a wonderful time as he is learning the new cue. You will want to repeat this exercise many times with different family members until he comes to all family members consistently. Once he does, he is ready for the next step in training this behaviour.

The Next Step

In the next step, it is time for a game of hide-and-seek. While your puppy is in one room of the house and you are in another, say his name and give the cue “Come” in a happy voice. Use your happy voice to encourage him to come find you. The second you see him, mark his forward movement and give him a **jackpot** of many small treats when he gets to you. This was much more difficult than when he could see you, so let him know how proud you are of him. **Repeat this exercise a few times a day over many days.** When he comes to you quickly every time you call his name, it is time to start adding distractions.

Adding Distractions

A distraction can be a toy, another person, or anything your puppy will want to pay attention to more than to you. Give your puppy a toy to play with and walk a few steps away. Say his name and give the cue “Come” in a **happy** voice. When he looks up at you, encourage him to come to you. Mark any forward movement, and offer him a **jackpot** of rewards. Then, tell him to go play, or use another word that releases him. This is to let him know that even though you may be interrupting his playtime, he can get a treat from you and go back to playing with his toy. Repeat this a few times a day over the next 10 days, extending the distance between the two of you until you can give him a toy, walk out of the room, call his name with the cue “Come,” and he drops his toy to see what you want or have for him.

Once he is consistent at coming to you when he is playing with his toy, you can now add another distraction — a person. Ask someone to start playing with the puppy. Then, standing just a few feet away, say his name in a happy voice and ask him to *come*. If he looks at you, encourage him to come until he reaches you, and offer him a **jackpot** of treats and lots of petting, and tell him what a good boy he is. If he is too distracted with the other person, walk over to him and lure him. Let him smell the treat for just a second and walk away. Encourage the other person to continue playing with him. Then, quickly call his name and offer the cue “Come” in a happy voice. Do this quickly, as you do not want him to forget you have that wonderful treat waiting for him. Once he is consistently coming to you while someone else is playing with him, begin to extend the distance between the two of you until you can be at the other end of the house, call him by name and give the cue “Come,” and he will come even though he is getting attention from someone else. You will want to repeat this exercise many times with different family members until he comes to all family members consistently.

The next step in training this behaviour is with other animals in the house. You will take the same steps as you did with the other distractions. **Always move at your puppy’s pace**—do not progress too quickly. You want him to be successful when learning new behaviours, and failure can result if the training process is rushed.

Distractions Outside the House

Once your puppy is consistent with handling distractions inside, it is time to move the training outside. When you are beginning to train him to *come* on cue outside, you will always want to keep him safe.

Dogs do not generalise well, which means the *come* cue may be brand new to him outside. With a loose leash on the dog, face him and take a few steps backward. Say his name and give the cue “Come” in a happy voice. The second he looks at you, encourage him to come; then mark and reward him for coming. Once he does come to you, **it is important to release** him to go play again. Words such as “Go play,” or “Free dog,” will work as a release—just keep the release consistent throughout the puppy’s training. Repeat the “Come” cue a few more times outside until your puppy comes to you consistently.

As he becomes more consistent, you can use a long line to extend the distance between the two of you. At this point, the behaviour is not as established as it should be for him to be allowed off-leash. *Taking your puppy off-leash too quickly can lead to many problems and could be dangerous for him.* Being outside without a leash or long line is a privilege that must be earned. If you take him off-leash before the puppy is ready, he may run away from you to play. Once he figures out he can run away from you when he does not have a leash on, training the *come* cue and other behaviours becomes more difficult. Wait to unleash him until he is consistently coming to you outside with many different distractions.

After a few months of consistent behaviour, you can begin training him to *come* on cue off-leash **in a fenced area**. When you take him off-leash, ask for the *come* while close to him and slowly extend the distance a foot or two at a time. **A word of caution:** Avoid training the *come* behaviour too many times in the same day or having the training sessions occur too close together in time. You do not want to habituate him to the cue *come*.

It is very important that the puppy is always rewarded for coming to you, no matter how long it takes. Coming to you should always be a pleasant experience so that in time he will know coming to you is always an opportunity for a nice treat or that something good will happen. Once he is conditioned to *come* on cue, you can begin to offer the rewards intermittently.



If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us