



Kingsbrook Animal Hospital

5322 New Design Road, Frederick, MD, 21703

Phone: (301) 631-6900

Website: KingsbrookVet.com

Puppy – Training Come, Wait and Follow

How can I get my puppy to come when called?

Teaching a puppy to “come” on command is a very difficult but important task. Start early because a puppy that will come when called is safer! In addition, most young puppies do not like to stray too far from their owners. All it takes is a kneeling owner and a happy “come” command, and your young puppy may willingly approach (without the need for any food or toy prompt). Similarly, most young puppies will automatically come and follow as you walk away.



However, by 3 to 4 months of age, as puppies become a little more independent and exploratory, more appealing rewards may be needed. The two most important rules about teaching your puppy to come to you are to set up the puppy for success (so that you never fail) and to ensure that each training session is simple, fun and pleasurable.

"Never call your puppy to you for discipline!"

Start by backing away from your puppy 1 to 3 feet and wiggle a food treat or a favored toy (prompt) in front of its nose. At the same time say the puppy's name and “come.” Use a happy inviting tone of voice. When your puppy comes to you, praise it lavishly and give the treat or toy. Then repeat. Start by only moving short distances, and then gradually have the puppy come further to reach you. Reinforce this task by calling your puppy multiple times daily, giving a pat or a food treat and sending it on its way. Try to avoid only calling the puppy to you to bring it inside, to put it in its crate or to otherwise end something fun. Be sure to spend time calling the puppy over and then releasing it; this will help the puppy learn that by coming to you, good things happen. Remember it is critical to succeed with every training session. Stay close to the puppy, make certain that there are no distractions and proceed slowly.

Over time, the puppy should be very slowly taught to come from progressively farther distances and in environments with a greater number of distractions. If there is any chance that the puppy might escape or disobey, have the puppy wear a long remote leash (which can be left dangling as the puppy wanders and investigates). Then if the puppy does not immediately obey the “come” command, a gentle tug of the leash can be used to get the puppy's attention, and a repeated command in an upbeat, happy voice (along with a food or toy prompt) should ensure that the “come” command is successful and rewarding.

How can I teach my new puppy to “wait” or “follow”?

Teaching a puppy to “wait” or “follow” are extensions of the other tasks you should have already taught. To teach your puppy to follow at your side (heel), use a food treat, place it by your thigh and entice the puppy both vocally and with the food to “heel.” As the puppy follows its nose to stay near the treat, it will also be learning to heel

For dogs that constantly walk ahead or pull, teaching your dog to follow should begin in a location where there are few distractions, such as in your backyard. To ensure success you should keep a leash or leash and head collar on your dog. Begin with a “sit–stay” command, and give a reward. Start to walk forward and encourage your dog to follow or heel as above, using a food reward held by your thigh. Be certain to allow only a few inches of slack on the leash so that if your dog tries to run past you, you can pull up and forward on the leash so that the puppy returns to your side. Once the puppy is back in the proper position (by your side for “heel” or behind you for “follow”), provide a little slack in the leash and begin to walk forward again. Continue walking with verbal reinforcement and occasional food rewards given as the dog follows. Each time the dog begins to pass you or pull ahead, pull up and forward on the leash and release as the dog backs up.

"Training sessions should begin when there are no external stimuli outdoors."

Although the dog could be made to sit each time it pulls forward, the goal is to have the dog return to your side. In fact, what your puppy is learning is that if he wants to walk forward he will only succeed if he keeps the leash slack. Another method to keep the dog walking by your side or behind is to turn and walk in the other direction. Remember to reward or praise as long as the leash remains loose. If the dog “puts on the brakes” and will not follow, all you need to do is release the tension and verbally encourage the dog to follow. Once you have the dog successfully heeling in the yard with no distractions, you can proceed to the front yard and the street, at first with no distractions, until good control is achieved (see Teaching Loose Leash Walks, Backing Up, and Turning Away, Training Products – Collars and Harnesses, Training Products – Head Halter Training, Training Products – Head Halter Training – Synopsis, and Training Products – To Choke or Not to Choke).

How can I teach my dog to wait?



Although much the same as “stay,” this command is important for the dog that might otherwise bound out the front door, lunge forward to greet people and other dogs, or run across a busy street. Begin with “sit–stay” training, until the dog responds well in situations where there are few distractions such as indoors or in your backyard. Next, find a situation where the dog might try to pull ahead, such as at the front door, so that you can begin to teach the “wait” command. Training sessions should begin when there are no external stimuli outdoors (other dogs, people) that might increase your dog’s motivation to run out the door. Use a leash or leash and head collar to ensure control. Begin with a “sit–stay” by the front door. While standing between your dog and the door, and with only a few inches of slack on the leash, give the wait command and open the

door. If the dog remains in place for a few seconds, begin to walk out the door and allow your dog to follow. Then repeat, with longer waits at each training session. If however, when you open the door or begin to walk out, your dog runs ahead of you, you should pull up on the leash, have your dog sit, release, give the “wait” command and repeat until successful. Once your dog will successfully wait for a few seconds and follow you out the door, gradually increase the waiting time, and then try with distractions (dogs or people on the front walk). This training should also be tried as you walk across the street, or before your dog is allowed to greet new people or dogs it meets.

To achieve a progressively more relaxed response see Teaching Calm – Settle and Relaxation Training and Teaching Loose Leash Walks, Backing Up, and Turning Away.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by: Debra Horwitz, DVM, DACVB & Gary Landsberg, DVM, DACVB, DECAWBM
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