

How To Teach Your Dog ‘Come’ and ‘Stay’

They say that the two most important behaviors to teach your dog are “COME” and “STAY.” These behaviors can literally save your dog’s life.



By Kelley Bollen

Let’s start with STAY. Teaching your dog to STAY requires a lot of patience and practice. If you want to teach your dog a super reliable STAY, you need to understand that there are three separate components to work on; they are: *duration* (how long the dog has to stay where she is), *distance* (how far away you move from your dog), and *distractions* (everything else that is going on around her). In order to be successful training your dog to STAY, you should concentrate on one of these components at a time. If you try to teach all of them at the same time, your dog is likely to fail.

Duration is the first component of STAY that you should work on. Your dog needs to learn that when you say “stay,” he should not move from where he is until you tell him to. Starting in a distraction-free environment and staying right next to your dog, you should slowly increase the duration of time you require him to stay in place. Start with a few seconds and slowly increase the duration a few seconds at a time. Make sure to reward your dog for each increase in duration. If your dog breaks his STAY, you are probably requiring more duration than he can handle. Increase the required duration slowly.

Once your dog can STAY for 30 seconds of duration, you can begin to work on distance. When you start to add distance take only one step away at first and slowly increase the number of steps you take away from her each session. If your dog breaks her STAY, you are probably moving too far away too soon. Remember to reward her for every successful STAY.

The last component to work on to teach a reliable STAY is the distraction piece. There are tons of distractions in the world – sounds, smells, activities, people, other dogs, squirrels, etc. Your dog will have to learn to STAY regardless of these distractions. When you begin to work on teaching STAY in the distracting world, you will have to start all over – with duration first, and then adding distance. Don’t expect your dog to be able to STAY for 3 minutes with you 10 steps away at the park the way he does in your living room.

The other important behavior to teach your dog is to COME when called. If your dog doesn’t come to you when you call him, there is no way you can take him off leash. Teaching a reliable recall takes a ton of work but it’s the best thing you can put time into for you and your dog. A dog who comes when he is called can have a much more enriching life so I encourage you to spend whatever time it takes.

The most important thing to do while training the recall is to reward your dog *every* time with an *amazing* treat for coming to you when called. Remember that your dog has other motivations driving her behavior that far outweigh coming to you. Things like playing with other dogs, greeting people, chasing a squirrel, and sniffing the world are all super



reinforcing to your dog. You have to make it worth her while to leave those things and come running to you when called. Building a solid reinforcement history is imperative.

Like with the STAY training, you should work on recall training systematically. Start in a non-distracting environment (inside your house) with your dog only a few feet away from you. Teach your dog that the word COME means to run to you straight away to receive an amazing reward. Slowly increase the distance you are from your dog when you call him until you are a good ways away before you start to add distractions.

The first distraction is the outside world. Start in the yard and work there until you can be the farthest possible distance away when you call him. Then move to an open field where there are no other people or dogs and work your dog on a long line. Increase the distractions slowly going to different locations with different distractions. Trust me when I tell you that there is nothing better than to have a dog that rockets back to you every time when you call him regardless of where you are or what is going on.

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