

COME, ROVER, COME!!... WHO ME??

Every pup/dog needs to learn the COME behavior and be able to respond on command. I am covering this topic early in the book because it is crucial for all pups and all dogs. A solid COME/RECALL on your pup/dog can truly make the difference between life and death or severe injury or getting lost. Every owner should begin training this behavior within the first couple of days if not the first week of bringing their pup/dog home. Whether starting with a pup or older dog, the process is basically the same.

Pups are easier in some ways and harder in other ways. Pups have short attention spans. They primarily interested in fun, games, and play. If their attention happens to be focused something other than you at the precise moment to want them to “come”, they will be unresponsive. This is not ignoring you or being stubborn or willful. They may truly not “hear/understand” what you are saying. Remember they are still learning human sounds/language. Just because they happen to respond one time, this does not mean they understand “come”. You may have been lucky and happened to get their attention directed to you. If this scenario occurs, they may come running to you. This most likely is not because they understand “come”, rather because they want to interact with you. Adult dogs have to overcome the incorrect behaviors and habits you have inadvertently taught them.

The most crucial element to teaching your pup/dog COME is to make “*coming to YOU*” the greatest, most rewarding thing your dog can do! The second most crucial element is to be 110% consistent with ALL aspects of the COME program. The third crucial element is to always ensure the SUCCESS of your dog with the behavior you are training. And, as with all teaching and training of the dogs, you must be patient and understanding.

With all dogs, you will want to take advantage of “accidental or incidental” behavior...and, reinforce it. Anytime your pup/dog is coming toward you on their own accord, say COME, GOOD COME. Give them a treat, praise them...make them feel like they have just won the lottery...they CAME to Mom or Dad!!!! Initially, the actual words will not mean anything to them. But, after many repetitions, they will attach the word COME to the behavior/action.

You should place containers with small dry treats or kibble around the house (out of the dog’s reach). It is also good to have treats or kibble in your pocket at any time you would not have access to the containers. This allows you to always have a treat handy to REWARD the dog when they come to you on their own or when you call. Additionally, you will want to do specific training sessions for the COME. *Note: Training sessions for ANY behavior must be kept very short, only 2-5 minutes at a time.* For these sessions, you will “elicit/coax” the COME behavior and attach the word to the behavior.

Take a treat and put it in front of the dog’s nose (let them know you have a treat). Then when you have their attention on the treat, walk backwards...keeping the treat right in

front of their nose (nibbling is okay)...say *Come, Good Come!* Take only a couple of steps at first. Then stop and give the dog the treat and mega praise...*come, good come!* *Caution: Do NOT back up too far or for too long without releasing the dog & giving them the treat OR the dog will lose interest.* You never want them to lose interest in you or the treat when teaching the COME. Very gradually you can increase the number of steps backwards before giving them the treat and praising them for coming to you. The key here is not to push the number of steps backward before the treat and praise beyond their threshold to stay focused and follow you. Remember you are teaching them that *coming to YOU* is the end all, be all. This means ensuring they are successful. Otherwise, they will not connect what you are doing to any particular behavior and you will be complicating the “patterning” process.

When the pup/dog seems to be getting the idea in the above phase, you can try being a couple of feet away from them. Get their attention, let them know you have a treat, and when they start toward you with the treat in your hand, say *come, good come!* When you are having success with this phase, as they start toward then you start moving backward as described above. Again, do not back up too far, too fast. You must realize that when your pup/dog “starts” to respond to this training, they are a long way from truly understanding what COME means! Initially, they are merely offering a behavior you are eliciting from your actions. It still does not mean anything to them, yet! They are reacting, reflexing. They are not exhibiting a behavior they truly understand.

Eventually you can be across the room from your pup/dog, call their name, when they look up...wave the treat and say *come, good come.* When they start toward you, repeat *come, good come!* Remember you must always have their attention and keep their attention.

Now, a few side notes to keep in mind when training the COME:

1) Pups have very short attention spans. So, you must be super exciting, animated, and interesting! They are still discovering and investigating their world. Everything is interesting and new. They can get diverted to something else on their way to you. You have to ensure you are absolutely the MOST interesting thing in their environment at that precise moment.

2) Adult dogs have learned that you repeat COME over and over. What they have learned is COME is a series of “come sounds”. You have patterned them to respond on the sixth, seventh, or eighth COME. This means they do NOT have to *come* until you have completed the full COME command. For the pups/dogs this means their COME command is “come, come, come, come, come, come, come, COME! They may have become “desensitized” the sound of the come command. Basically, they learned to “tune out” the word *come*. This is not their fault or them being stubborn. They are only responding to what they have been taught and conditioned to do.

3) With a pup/adult dog, IF you have used repeated COMES....as in “come, come, come, Rover, come, come, COME, come....” by this point you are pretty ticked off/upset/not happy! So, when the pup/dog does finally *come* you are exasperated and you yell at

them...I TOLD YOU TO COME. GET IN HERE!!!! Well, if you are that displeased or angry when they DO come to you, believe me, “coming to you” will be the last thing they will want to do again. The dogs do not understand that your displeasure, irritation, or anger is because it took six “comes” to get them into you. They ONLY understand that when they DO *come* to you, it is not good and you are NOT happy or pleased. Always be aware of WHAT you are actually teaching and communicating to your dog.

4) BE PATIENT...BE CONSISTENT...BE INTERESTING, KEEP THEIR ATTENTION!!!!

5) Always take advantage anytime your pup/dog “comes to you” on their own accord. Use the command... *come, good come*...every time the dog is moving toward you. Give them a treat, praise them and play with them (even if only for just 30 seconds). Make the fact that they came to you the absolute GREATEST! You may think this takes more time than you have to give. Consider that this is a meager amount of time compared to the amount of time you will spend for years trying to call them.....IF... your dog does NOT have a solid COME!

6) Take the entire process slowly. DO NOT set the dog up to FAIL on a *come* command. When teaching them, always make sure that whatever you are doing will ensure the dog will move toward you before you use the actual COME command.

7) For many months, NEVER use the COME except when doing a training exercise or when they “offer” the behavior. Make sure that the only time they hear the COME command is when you can “guarantee” the correct behavior will occur.

8) Remember, it is important to have the training of the *come* be 100% POSITIVE! Coming to Mom or Dad CANNOT be negative in any regard or at any time. If this happens, the dog will always have a slight hesitancy in “coming to you”, because they will never be sure when it is good or when it is bad.

At this point you are saying, well...if I can't use the word...unless I can make sure it is solid...HOW the heck do I get my dog in from the yard. IF you are willing to walk out into the yard, get their attention, and show them the treat...this will work. Otherwise, you will need to use alternative means and/or words. You can say, let's go, come on in here, let's go to the house, cookie, or whatever. You can use a noise maker like a squeaky toy, a whistle. The point is to use anything to get their attention. Then when they are headed into you solidly, you can say *come, good come* and, give mega praise and treat when they get to you. *Note: When in the training phase, never say COME unless you can ensure you can help the dog COME successfully.*

When training ANY behavior, it is essential that the dog NOT be allowed to FAIL. The dog must be SUCCESSFUL repeatedly. The learning process with the dogs is very parallel to the learning process with people. The dogs will experience confusion, the normal ups and downs associated with every learning process. There is a saying that “no behavior has been truly learned...UNTIL, it has been learned, forgotten and seemingly “relearned again”. Then, it is a solid behavior. This is as true with dogs as it is with

people, if not more so. For example, when we are learning a new language or skill...we will progress quickly. Then, it is like we hit a brick wall. Not only can we not seem to learn anything more, we are not even proficient at what we had learned up to that point. We struggle and many people will actually give up because their sense is "I can't do this!"

This is the exact stage when the dogs cannot do what they were doing "perfectly" yesterday. This is the stage when people will think the dogs are being stubborn. They are NOT! They are experiencing a very essential part of the "learning process". The very same thing we people experience in our learning processes. Unfortunately, this is also the point when we will "lose patience" with the dogs. This is precisely when you need to be MORE patient, understanding, and clear in what you are teaching them. You can get them through this stage with the behavior strongly intact; or you can totally confuse the dog or demolish all sense of understanding they had up to this stage. The most amazing part of this phase is that it is the precursor for "total understanding" and subsequently, an enormous learning upswing...IF we don't destroy it and set the dog back. Recognize that you are at the threshold of your dog truly understanding. Preserve this, build on this, and reinforce it.

Back to the teaching of the COME, you want to always keep the dog's interest and since it takes many months to "lock in" this behavior, we need to have fun and be creative! So, do crazy, fun games that cause your dog to move toward you. Each time they move toward you, reinforce the behavior. Say, *come, good come*. Treat and praise them so they associate coming to you as being the best thing in the world.

Here are some examples of things to do to make this part of the training super fun and motivating and rewarding for you dog:

1) When playing with the dog, suddenly turn and run the opposite direction. They love to chase. When they are running after you, say *come, good come* one time. Then, turn and give them a treat. As you give them their treat, praise them with *come, good come*.

2) Get two toys your dog loves. Toss one about 2-3 feet (further distances later). The dog will run out for the toy. As soon as they have that toy, get their attention waving the other toy. They will run back to you for the second toy. As they are running back to you, say *come, good come*. Then repeat this process several times. *Note: If your dog brings the first toy back to you and release that toy to take the second toy, this is great. You can use this "offered" behavior to begin teaching your dog the "give" command. At precisely the moment your dog releases the first toy, say "give". The word won't mean anything at first. But, after many, many repetitions the word will mean to release whatever the dog has in their mouth. Do not make this an integral part of the come training session. It is merely an ancillary opportunity presenting itself.* The two- toy trade game is a great fun for the dogs and the owners. If your dog is not into toys, use a treat. Toss a treat, when they get that treat get their attention on the second treat and call them to you. When they are coming toward you, say *come, good come*. You may also want to start getting your dog interested in toys. Do this separate from the *come* exercise. Develop this behavior in

separate “play” sessions devoted solely to playing with your dog.

3) Restrained Recalls/Comes: This exercise takes two people. When I am teaching the recall/come, every person that comes to my house is enlisted to help and contribute. This includes friends, family, service people, yard guys, delivery people, everyone. I have even enlisted the help of my postman and UPS guys. This only takes about two minutes, so it is not a big deal to get people to help and most people really enjoy participating and seeing what you can do with your pup/dog. *Note: If using a stranger, you have to make sure your dog is not fearful of strangers and the person meets/greets your pup/dog properly. If enlisting the help of someone your pup/dog is not comfortable with, this will defeat or at the very least complicate the purpose of the restrained recall/come exercise.*

You and the other person should have a couple of treats with you. Have the other person kneel down. They hold (restrain) your dog while they watch you walk across the room. It helps if you are animated as you walk away from your pup/dog. The dog will be squirming and lunging to follow after you. The other person holds on to them. When you get across the room, you kneel down, pull out the toy or treat, and wave it to get your dog’s attention. Call their name several times (excitedly) to get them really revved up. When the dog is at a fever pitch wanting you, the toy, or the treat with all due fervor say COME (once) excitedly. At this “exact, precise” moment, the other person “releases” the dog. It is like the dog is jet propelled or catapulted. They will run full out to get to you. When they get there, give the treat or play with the toy big time!!!! Mega praise!!!! This will keep them “wanting” to RUN to you!!!! Then, you hold the dog and repeat the above process in reverse (dog running to other person). Most dogs will do this process toward the other person. Some will not. If yours does not, and when you release them, they just turn around to stay with you then, just do your repetitions with the other person holding the dog each time.

This entire exercise is great for teaching the recall/come. However, other important benefits are occurring. This allows your dog to have interaction with many different people. This is wonderful for basic and necessary “socialization”. Also, the different situations you use for this exercise will help train your dog to have a solid recall/come regardless of the situation or environment.

I have a final note on puppies. Almost all puppies have a “behavior quirk” that absolutely WILL occur somewhere between 3-6 mos. of age. Even when they have been very good on their *come*, (because you have done everything right), they will suddenly start to DART away from you. This is the same puppy that you could not previously keep out from under your feet. When your pup has entered this stage of their puppy development, this behavior will occur when you reach out to pick them up or pet them. It will also occur when they come to you and want you to play or pet them. They may bring you a toy or even bark at you. This is the puppy stage where they want to “teach you” their games. They are attempting to teach you a great new game...CHASE. Honestly, almost all pups will exhibit this behavior. Your pup is not being stubborn or willful. Remember that ALL dogs love to play games and they are trying to teach you their new game!

When you reach to pick up the pup, pet them, or take the toy from them to play, they will dart away. This behavior will entail them jumping, hopping, darting, play crouching, barking. They will do anything and everything to entice you to chase them. When your pup hits this stage, you CANNOT play the chase game. You CANNOT scold them for it either, even though this phase is exceedingly frustrating. You must IGNORE it! The dogs are not doing anything wrong. Rather they have accepted you as their family and they want to interact with you just as they instinctually would do with their fellow pack members in the dog/dog world. However, for your sanity and their COME training, you cannot play the game. So, you just walk away. Never go after them. Never say NO. Never scold. Never chase them at this point! Just ignore the game and leave them. Understand that they want to interact with you. When this behavior causes you to IGNORE them, after several days or weeks they will abandon this game. Know that IF you try to catch the dog at this point, you are playing the game!

Don't get me wrong, playing "chase" is great fun for the dogs and for you. However, the only time you play *chase* is on YOUR TERMS, not when working on the COME. Consequently, it is probably advisable to not play chase in any form while your pup is in this stage. If you do, this will only create confusion. Your pup will not be able to differentiate between when playing chase is acceptable and when it is not. Since this is a naturally occurring behavior, you will only confuse your pup and complicate your "come" training. *CAUTION: When your pup is in this stage, make sure you have plenty of time to "wait them out/ ignore them" before you have to leave the house. When you have to get them inside or in their crate so you can leave, if you do not give yourself this extra time, you will only be setting yourself up to play the chase game. Ultimately, you are reinforcing the chase game and you will get upset at your dog. This is totally counterproductive and the worst possible scenario when you are trying to teach the dog that "coming to you" is the end all, be all!*

Another problem can occur when teaching your pup/dog the "come". When teaching the "come" to your dog, I do not recommend using the "come command" to get them inside or to you so they can be placed in their crate because you are leaving the house or time for them to go to bed. Remember I have you should not use the "come command" for anything unpleasant while teaching your dog the "come". This includes anything the pup/dog perceives as unpleasant. Certainly, being ending their play and/or you leave the house would constitute something not desirable for the pup/dog. Again, we are talking about in the training phase. *Note: If you train your pup/dog to love their crate and to run to it on command, you will be ahead of the game. However, I would still not use the "come command" for their crate WHILE training the "come".*

This leads us into another important aspect of properly and effectively teaching your dog the "come". As part of your training program, frequently you will want to call your dog to you. Pick them up, contain them, or hold on to them. Pet, hug, and love on them. However, you will want to do this for just a moment. Almost immediately after them getting some satisfaction from coming to you, RELEASE them to continue playing and being free. This prevents them from associating coming to you as always ending their fun and play or being crated or you leaving. Rather they learn that coming to you, being

picked up or contained more often than not...means I get much praise, treats, toys, love, affection...and, then another play session.

When your pup/dog is reliably responding to the sound of your “come command”, you can reinforce it throughout your home and when you are out of their sight. Using this exercise will build/pattern a stronger “come reflex” in your dog. You will want to have their treats in little containers throughout your home. When you out of their sight, you call their name and then say COME. Initially, only do this when you know they are not overtly engaged in another activity like playing with another dog or person or barking at something outside or eating. When you first do the out of sight COME, you want to ensure your dog can be successful. Do not tempt fate or push your luck by trying this when they are really involved in something else. If you are careful in all the teaching/training phases, you will be able to use the COME in any situation. The dogs who are the most solid on their COME are the ones who have never had the opportunity to realize there is an option. Pattern the COME behavior solidly and completely for the greatest level of success. This may well save their life. Remember to have all due PATIENCE and CONSISTENCY when teaching the COME.

Regardless of how solid your dog is and has been on their COME, you will do your dog a great service by periodically revisiting the COME games and reinforcing the wonderfulness of coming to you. Once the dogs know the COME, their owners tend to get lax in using and reinforcing the “come command” properly. It is essential to reinforce coming to you as the most worthwhile and wonderful thing your dog can do. Never take their COME for granted. Here are some examples of things you can do throughout your dog’s life.

- 1) When your dog isn’t expecting anything, say “come, good come” and have a treat for them or a toy and play for a minute.
- 2) Walking across the room, pick up a toy and get your dog’s attention. Say “come, good come”, and when they run to you toss the toy between your legs or to the side of your legs so your dog runs past you. The dogs love the unexpected.
- 3) Call the dog to you and suddenly take off running away from them so they are chasing you.
- 4) Periodically, be in another room and say “come, good come” and have them find you. When they find you, they get a treat and praise or a wonderful play session.
- 5) If your dog loves for you to throw their ball or toy, act like you throw it. When they take off after it, say “come” and when they turn to run back to you throw the toy in a different direction.

Keep your dog ALWAYS wanting to stay alert for the best WORD in the entire world...COME!!!! No other *word* should bring such wonderful things into their lives. No other *behavior* should make Mom /Dad happier. All dogs love to play games and they

always want to win. Make sure the COME games are the best and most rewarding games they can play with you. Ensure they always WIN the game. Meaning, make sure you do all the right things to make sure your dog “comes” to you when you call them.

When you do all of these things, you and your dog will both WIN! This ongoing process will make your relationship with your dog stronger. It will help make you the center of your dog’s life. This will make your life easier. It will make your life with your dog more satisfying and rewarding. And, it could truly save their life.

Let me share with you a story about the importance of building a solid and reliable COME/RECALL in your dog even though you may never expect it could have a lifesaving result. Several years ago a lady in another state read my COME, ROVER, COME article on the Westie Club website. She followed the program exactly on her dog who was a couple of years old when she found the article and undertook the training. This lady did not have a problem with her adult dog and her dog was never out of a secured area without being on leash. However, after reading the article she felt it would be wise to teach this to her dog.

Some time after having taught her little Chloe the COME, she had some workers at her house. One of them brought in some equipment and dropped something very close to Chloe. The front door was lodged open. Chloe had never darted out the door in her life. In a split of a second, Chloe jumped and darted to get away from what had just fallen next to her. Her path of escape happened to be out the door and she was so scared she was running full speed. The busy street they lived loomed right in front of Chloe. She was going to make it into the street before she even realized what was happening. Instead of panicking, her Mom went out the door knelt down and called COME! Within a few feet of the curb and the busy street, Chloe stopped, turned, and ran back to her Mom. The way I found out about this incident was when Chloe’s Mom e-mailed me to share the story. I did not know this lady or that she had even read my article several years before. I now have a beautiful, framed picture of Chloe in my home. And, a couple of years ago Chloe, her Mom, and Dad drove to a Dog Show I was attending in their part of the country and I was able to meet them in person.

The lesson here is to never take the COME command for granted with your dog. Give it the attention and reinforcement it deserves.

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