

Q & A

Train Fido Like an Expert

Have a dog who won't come when you call? Dog trainer Paul Sheinberg gives his tricks to have your pup come running in no time.

by Paul Sheinberg
Community contributor

From Amy: My dog Bella, a miniature schnauzer, used to always stay right by my side. We have a fenced-in yard and whenever I would call her she'd come running over. Now, when I call her she either pretends she doesn't hear me or walks the other way — she begrudgingly complies after a couple minutes. I never yell at her and she has a great life. What gives?

Hi, Amy. I love schnauzers. Like Sir Ian McKellen, the regal schnauzer tends to be aloof, coy and sometimes a little cranky.

Everyone needs a reason, a motivation to travel from one destination to another. Dogs are no exception.

During the honeymoon phase, dogs will usually run over to their owners at the slightest provocation. They have no reason not to. As the days, weeks and months go by, and you start to learn more about their behaviors and habits, they start to make connections about your behaviors and habits. And they're better at it than you are. While you're busy trying to figure out why they are barking, digging and whining, they've already figuring out how to get your attention, how to get a treat, how to get what they want when they want. Dogs are instinctual creatures — they do what works. So, if by calling them back into the house from being outside means nothing more than playtime is over, then why would they come back?

Now, assuming Bella gets a couple of walks and some mental stimulation throughout the day, this should be all you need to teach Bella a great recall: when Bella is out in the yard, grab a toy and/or cookie and call her to you like you normally would. When she finally does come to you — even if its minutes later — take out the toy and play with



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About the author

Paul Sheinberg, owner of Pawsitive Paul's Dog Training, holds classes at Good Doggie Daycare in Baltimore. He has appeared numerous times on Fox's Good Day Baltimore taking viewers calls and demonstrating various pet behaviors. Learn more at pawsitivepaul.com.

back inside and let Bella stay outside. After 10 to 15 minutes, go back and call her again. This time, she'll come back to you much quicker.

For the next week or so, call Bella over to you every so often for no other reason than to say hello, play with her or to give her a treat. It shouldn't be long before she starts running over to you regardless of why you're calling her. If you call her and it takes longer

make absolutely sure you do not yell at her or pull her back inside. Now, if Bella was a child and you sternly explained why they need to come to you when you call them, they might understand and come to you quicker next time (or might not). Dogs are not children. Dogs have a much different concept of time than we do. If you call them to you and after they finally come to you, you yell at them or are stern with them, you'll make it worse. The reason is simple: in their mind, you called them, they came over and you yelled at them. That's it. They can't rationalize like we do — they will not think "oh, you wanted me to come to you quicker." What goes through their mind is "you called me over and scolded me. I guess I wasn't supposed to come over after all. Maybe I'll try running the other way next time. Yep. That must be what you wanted."

Call Bella over to you a few times a day for no other reason than to say hello. When she comes to you, praise her and let her be on her way. After a while, she'll be running back to you every time you call her.

It could take a few weeks for a good recall to become consistent, so until then there are two ways you can get your dog to come back to you if they escape, are running wild and have little concept of recall.

First, try getting your dog's attention and then run in the opposite direction. About 30 percent of the dogs out there will start to chase you. Another, more consistent but messier way is to get your dogs attention and then fall to the ground. You'd be shocked at how many dogs will go from frantic, "keep away" mode to "hey, why are you lying on the ground? I must trot over to you now" mode in a matter of seconds. Just make sure when they trot on over to you, you don't grab the leash and say, "Gotcha!" or it will never work again