



The “Call Out”

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The **Call Out** is useful for teaching a dog to break his concentration. This particular method helps do it in an uplifting and fun fashion—helping to build a happy emotional response to the call-out. This is super-helpful in tense situations such as fight/flight or prey drive. This is a skill that actually builds neural pathways between the “primitive” parts of the brain and the forebrain. This skill becomes stronger the more you work at it—like weightlifting. It is ideal to start with practicing several times a day until the response is very automatic, then maintain the skill with a couple of practices a week.

Utility: The skill is especially useful for dog-dog introductions, calling a pup off of a cat or bunny, or building up a generalized ability to focus on you in the face of distractions. This is one of my foundational skills that I believe can help every dog-human pair to gain greater partnership and bonding.

Level of difficulty to teach: Easy

Level of skill learned: Advanced

Equipment needed:

Low value treats

High value treats

Treat pouch or convenient treat holder

When played outside a harness and longline for safety.

TO TEACH THE CALL OUT:

Step 1 (establishing baseline): The handler steps towards the dog’s head, gently taps dog on the shoulder, claps hands near dog’s face and calls the dog’s name in a very excited happy tone, drawing the dog’s attention to him and gives the dog multiple high value treats. Practice in sets of 3 to 5 times reps with several minutes between reps, until the dog eagerly looks at you when you touch his shoulder. Body language should be happy, eager, and enthusiastic.

Step 2 (basic skill, to be done in a quiet and calm area the dog is familiar with): Drop a handful of low value treats on the floor. Allow the pup to start eating. Reach out to the dogs shoulder and tap the pups shoulder, saying his name in an excited tone. When pup looks up, mark and give several high value treats . Practice 3 to 8 reps per session, 2 session per day until pup has a very quick, eager, response. Maintain response by practicing once or twice a week or a few days in a row of intensive reminders :)

Step 3 (advanced skill building level one): Repeat as in step one, JUST using the pups name. No physical touch. If pup responds—awesome! If pup does not respond, or is slow, use touch to remind him. Practice splitting.

Step 4 (Distraction and distance): Practice with increasing levels of distraction or distance. Other dogs or movement of other people in your home can be used as a distraction, practicing in other rooms or outdoors are increasing levels of distraction. To practice “distance” try the call out with you in different position related to the dog (front, side, rear) and then at increasing distances.

Pointers: Remember to keep rewards extremely high value. Make sure to reward at least 95% or better of responses. Do NOT make this a difficult task. Keep it simple and easy. Putting the dog in too many challenging situations erodes the strength of the response. If in doubt—don’t worry about making it harder! Remember to keep this fun!

Alternatives: Use a hand “clap” instead of a touch or the name.

Troubleshooting: If the dog looks at you with the stinky treats and refuses to eat the low value kibble you have several options. 1) Wait him out. Ignore him until he is well and happily eating the low value kibble. 2) Start using “sprinkles” to feed meals and wait a few days before starting the “call out” training. 3) Reduce meal size before the training, or use during meal time instead of regular meal. 4) Use higher value “low value” treats. 5) Use lower value “high value” treats.

If pup does not look up when you give the cues (touch clap and name) you’ll want to practice some classical conditioning. This can easily be done by stuffing some high value treats under his nose and feeding. You can also lure his head upward, depending on what he is ready for. If thi is not successful after 2-3 tries, go back to playing the name game.

NOTE: Roughly 800-1000 repetitions will make this a very strong, reliable behavior. 20-30 sessions a day done with 5 repetitions per session will accomplish this easily in 4-6 weeks.

TEST THE CALL OUT: Offer the dog a treat or toy but do not give it to him. Have the owner call the dog away from that offered treat or toy. If the dog will come away smoothly, he has a reliable call out.

USING the Call Out

- 1) “Go Say Hi-1-2-3” by Suzanne Clothier. Allow your pup to greet another dog. Keep leashes loose. Practice with familiar dog first. Allow pup to say hi—count to 3, and call out. Reward generously. Once the behavior is well established, you can use for stranger dog greetings provided body language leading up to the intro is good. Repeat 3x and evaluate response before allowing dog to play with each other. It can be used as a quick greeting, or to evaluate potential play partners.
- 2) As part of an emergency uturn
- 3) When playing off leash—keep practices few and far between!
- 4) When faced with cats or other potential prey.