

# Door Dasher Dog—Ask a trainer

By Nan Arthur, CDBC, CPDT, KPACTP

Dear Trainer;

My dog refuses to come when I call. He darts out the door all the time, and then I have to chase him through the neighborhood. I'm afraid he is going to get run over by a car. Do you have any ideas on how to get him to listen? He is two-years-old, and a Jack Russell Terrier.

Signed,

*Speed Racer Dog Mom*

Dear Speed Mom

When you have a dog that might lose his life because he won't come when called, you need an "Emergency Recall." This recall is verbal cue that you will strongly condition to mean, "Come running to me, right now, and the most amazing things in the world will be yours!"

Managing your environment is also important. Place a baby gate across the front door area so you have a reminder and a barrier that keeps your dog in the house. It's important that your dog not be allowed to practice the door-dashing if you are going to train through this.

Since you will need your dog to come RIGHT NOW, you will need the conditioned response to be so powerful that your dog doesn't even think about not responding. To ensure this type of response, you will use unorthodox rewards to build a strong recall behavior your dog will respond to even in the face of competing environmental distractions. In other words, if the world is Disneyland to your dog, you have to be Magic Mountain if you want your dog to respond every time.

### ***Using rewards that are above average***

Think, "Big Guns," in terms of the rewards as you work on your emergency recall. Food rewards are the simplest thing to use. However, you might also want to think in terms of using rewards such as a special tug toy, an almost empty toilet paper roll, or even a fast food bag and a couple of pieces of the real cheeseburger (left in part of the wrapping paper) inside for your dog to tear into and eat.

### ***Examples of High-Value Food Rewards:***

- Cheese burger from a fast food restaurant
- Roasted Chicken with the skin (no bones)
- Cooked ground beef or steak
- Meatballs
- Cheese cut into small chunks
- Vienna sausages
- Canned cheese spread (you will have to be willing to squirt it on the floor for this one)
- Meat baby food (messy as well, but well-loved by many dogs)

### ***Getting Started***

You will first need to pick a word that will become associated with the rewards, so use a word that will be easy to remember if you were in a panic and trying to get your dog back in the house.

#### **A few emergency recall cues might be:**

- Stop!
- Here!
- Front!
- Now!

#### ***How to do it:***

The first few rounds are the most important to use the super high-value rewards since you will want to make a significant, emotional impact on your dog's thought process. Be generous when your dog responds! Give him a number of rewards in a row, or a whole bunch of pieces at once, not just one when he responds. You really want him to think coming to you is a huge deal.

Be sure to train in a low distraction environment at first so your dog can concentrate on you, rather than other things that might interest him. Of course, working with a hungry dog will help this along faster.

Now walk over to your dog with a handful of the high-valued treats in your hand. Show him your treats; say your cue word quietly at first, *turn*, and then take three-five steps away from him, but watch over your shoulder so you can see his movement. The instant he starts to move toward you, say, "Good dog," and drop 3-4 treats right in front of your feet.

While he is eating those treats, quickly turn and step in another direction. Say your cue word a little louder this time while he is eating the first treats and say, "Good dog," just as he moves toward you. Do this 5-10 times, but on the final trial, drop the treats on the floor, and say, "All done."

Take a little break then come back and do a few more of the same exercise, but don't show your dog the treats this time, just say your cue word and move away. Do this in different areas of the house so your dog learns that you might make this game happen anywhere. Each time you work with your dog, vary the number of times and steps you take from your dog so there is no pattern to any of this.

It is very important that you don't become predictable. You wouldn't want to teach your dog that, only after you go into the kitchen and get the treats are you are going to play this game, or you always take four steps from him. You want to surprise him with this, very much as in real life. You might have to use this emergency recall to get him away from a diversion, so practice when he is slightly distracted early on, then build using your emergency recall during greater distractions.

You can avoid the predictability by keeping food rewards where you can quickly grab them. Canned cheese works well for this, or other nonperishable foods such as jerky.

As your dog becomes familiar with this first part, start to raise the volume of your voice, (such as what you might do if you were in a panic), so if you do need to use your emergency recall during a crisis, your dog will not be frightened if you happen to yell your recall word. Raise the volume of your voice slowly-- a little louder with each practice.

***Adding more movement to the game:***

After you have spent a week or two doing these first steps, 5-10 times each day, you can start adding more movement to the exercise. Say your cue, then run or move quickly 10-15 steps away from your dog so he has to catch up with you to get his reward and his, "Good dog." Most dogs love to chase after us, especially when there is a powerful reward for doing so. Chasing you will make it that much more rewarding for your dog.

It is important to do many repetitions at this level and once you see that your dog is following you all over; you can add more distance and start to play some hide-n-seek games with him. When your dog is not looking, hide (but not too hard at first) say your emergency cue, and when your dog finds you, have a party with lots of praise, treats, tug, or what ever else you think might make a strong impact on your dog.

Spend two-three weeks on this part, and then you can start to practice with a long-line leash that allows your dog to go out the front door for a little distance, but is still secured by the long leash. You will practice calling your dog back into the house. The rewards for this should be the most valuable of all. After a few weeks of this training, you should have a dog that responds very fast to your recall cue.

If you find you are still having trouble, you should contact a positive reinforcement trainer that can come to your home and help you with fine-tuning the process.

Nan Arthur, CDBC, CPDT, KPACTP

[www.wholedogtraining.com](http://www.wholedogtraining.com)