Teaching your dog to come to you

“Bear, Come!” I call out loud. What a fantastic feeling to see my rescued Aussie running back to me at full speed with his ears perked and a smile on his face. Bear was adopted two years ago and he was afraid of his own shadow. I knew I couldn’t let him off leash until I worked on a reliable recall with him. It warms my heart to see him running to me so eagerly. It didn’t happen right away, but with commitment to regular practice, keeping it fun and happy it paid off. A solid recall is a valuable behavior for your dog to learn. The better the recall, the safer he is off leash and he can enjoy more freedom. Here are some steps to work with your dog to get a good recall….

1. Get some real yummy treats (i.e. chicken, steak, hotdog, cheese about the size of a pea). When your dog hears the word “Come” in a loud, cheerful voice he will start to learn that something wonderful is going to happen. At first, your dog can be beside you and say “Come” and give him a treat. Keep repeating this cue and you will start to see your dog eagerly waiting for his treat.
2. Now have someone hold your dog’s leash, and you step away from your dog about 6 feet. Call your dog’s name to get his attention, and then call out “Come” in an enthusiastic voice. Treat him when he comes to you. Repeat this several times
3. You can make it fun with 2 people so that each person takes a turn calling your dog. Each person gives him a treat when he comes to them. I call this Doggy Ping Pong.
4. When your dog continues successfully doing this, start giving more distance with the leash (use a long line…not a Flexilead). Try going 10 ft and repeat several times.
5. The next step is to have someone hold your dog’s leash so you can walk away at a further distance. Tease you dog with a treat (wave it in front of his nose) and run away about 20 ft from your dog. Before you even call his name, make sure he is focused on you and not on something else. If he is not focused on you, go back to your dog calmly and remind him of the treat in your hand. Once focused, call your dog’s name followed by “Come”
6. Your body language is extremely important when your dog is approaching you. Squat sideways to your dog, as he runs to you say YES and put a couple of treats on the floor in front of you. As he is eating the treats, gently grab his collar so he doesn’t run off. I call this a “Hit and Run” if the collar is not grabbed, the dog may eat the treats quickly and run off.
7. Repeat this using more distance as your dog becomes more excited to come to you. Remember to make it FUN! Always have a cheerful, happy demeanor. Why would a dog like to come to someone looking grumpy and angry?

These are some things to consider when training your dog….Excitement in your voice is so important. Be silly and just have fun with your dog and remember to say your dog’s name loud enough to hear you. Recalls are taught so your dog should come back to you no matter what. Remember when they come to you always make it positive. If you call him and then put him immediately in a crate, or put him in the bathtub, etc he will not be as eager to come to you. As your dog advances in his training, you can start adding distractions such as having another person nearby, or toys. Be careful not to go too quickly adding distractions until your dog is ready. It is important for your dog to succeed.

Happy Training!