It’s very exciting when adopting a new canine family member. Teaching your new dog its name is one of the most important things to do. It is the foundation of all other training as well as building a relationship with you. When you call your dog’s name, it should be a cue for them to stop, turn toward and acknowledge you, give you their undivided attention and wait for further instruction. It’s important to always use their name in a positive way. If you use it in a negative or frustrated way when he is doing something you don’t like, he will associate it negatively and will learn to ignore it. Here is a fun way for your dog to recognize his name. I call it the Name Game.

1. Grab a bunch of yummy high value treats. Wave the pea sized treat in front of his nose. Throw the treat a couple of feet away from him on the floor. If the treat is worth it to him he will run over to the treat and eat it then start to look back at you for some more. Once he starts to turn his head to you immediately say his name in a cheerful voice. When he looks at you, throw another treat out (rewarding him for looking at you) and repeat calling his name.
2. Do this 8-10 times for a single session then give your dog a break. It becomes a real fun game for your dog since he is getting treats thrown on the floor with just him looking back at you. Make sure the initial training has very low distractions. Perform about 5 sessions a day.
3. Start practicing in different areas of your house and fenced in yard. If your yard isn’t fenced in, keep your dog on a leash. Perform about 5 sessions a day in various areas.
4. Build upon that and practice with many more distractions around, such as other dogs, toys and people.
5. You can also have the entire family play the name game. Have a few people say the dog’s name and reward when he looks at the person who said the name. Immediately have another person do the same, etc.
6. Once your dog is reliably looking at you, start to teach your dog to respond to his name no matter where he is by saying his name when he is out of sight in another room. If he comes running to you, reward him immediately with a treat and praise him. If he doesn’t, continue working with the name game in the above steps. Some dogs may take longer than others to learn their names and to respond to it. But with consistent, positive training he will learn his name soon enough.

Try your best to never call your dog’s name angrily. Also try not to use your dog’s name to call him over for anything unpleasant such as having his nails trimmed. You have to call him of course, but don’t give a negative experience immediately after calling his name. Instead, call him, ask him to come and when he arrives, make a fuss and let some time pass so he forgets and then perform your task. We don’t want him to think calling his name can end in something unpleasant. Try not to overuse your dog’s name for fear it becomes just noise to him and he will start to ignore it.

Happy Training!