

The Importance of Door Manners

Dogs who have the habit of bolting out of doors set themselves up for the potential of a variety of bad things. At best the dog will get a scolding for running around. Unfortunately, many dog owners can attest to the worst as well – dogs who got out and wound up in dog fights, knocked neighbors down, got lost and were never found, or were hit by traffic. It is vitally important that our dogs know what is expected of them whenever a door is opened.



Dogs should know to automatically sit at every open door. It takes some time to begin with, but it is worth it. You may want to use an interior door for this at first if the dog is really good at escaping. Stand with your back to a closed door facing the dog. Open the door a crack and when the dog goes to force her way through it, step in front of her. Wait for her to back off, then open the door a little farther, again being prepared to step in front of her when she heads for the opening. Continue to block her access out the door until she steps back and sits down in frustration. As soon as she sits down, praise her and let her through.

It is important during this exercise that you do not tell the dog to sit. The dog needs to figure it out by herself. This helps the dog learn to sit automatically whether she is told to sit or not.

You should also work on making recalls as fun as possible in order to make them more reliable. First of all, while you are teaching a more reliable recall it is important not to punish the dog if you have called her to you. That can be very frustrating, but if you call the dog and then punish her for running off, she will only be associating the punishment with the fact you called her, not the fact that she ran off. So if she runs away, whenever you get her, praise, praise, praise her and then put her somewhere safe and away from you if necessary so you can cool off.



Here are three exercises that I do with my own dogs to make their recalls better. They all need to be done in a safe area and/or while wearing a 20 ft long line.

- 1) Call the dog and as she starts to get to you, run away from her. You can throw in some zig zags and other direction changes, but be fun and be unpredictable while letting her chase you. **Never** chase her - you'll never catch her - but letting her chase you is tons of fun for the dog. A variation on this game is to run away from her, let her chase for a few steps, then turn, ask her to sit, give her treats while you take her collar, then turn and call her so she can chase you again. Do this 3 or 4 times.
- 2) Have someone hold the dog and distract her a bit. Hide somewhere (this is a great rainy day game in the house) and call the dog. Only say "come" once, but you can make all of the other noises you want to in order to help lead her toward you. When she gets to you make a huge fuss, then hold her while the other person hides. You can do this by yourself if the dog has a decent stay.
- 3) Take three similar toys. Have the dog stand next to you while you throw a toy and when it lands, send her for it. As soon as she gets it, call her to you and when she starts toward you, throw a second toy behind you. When she gets that one, call her again and throw the third toy in the same direction she's running. When she brings the toy to you to throw again, gently take control of her collar while you praise her, then when she is under your control, start the game again.

You can also work on getting the dog to enjoy being near after a fun time of running around. When you call the dog, drop to your knees or crouch as she approaches you. Throw treats on the ground between your knees so she has to come close to you to get her food. Gently take her collar and give her more treats. Basically you are making her love being right next to your body and teaching her that wonderful things happen when you have her collar. Also make a point of calling her to you, then releasing her to go back to having fun so she learns that coming to you does not always end her fun.



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