

Recall From Predatory Distractions

Chasing something that is moving -critters, cars, bikers and runners- is best handled first as a management issue. Or "don't put your dog in a position where it can make a mistake". Use the long line until your dog is desensitized to these distractions and knows that listening to you means a great reinforcement. Chasing is a behavior much better NEVER learned. It is naturally reinforcing to the dog, which makes it hard for us to offer a better reinforcement. That said, if you want to have to have a bombproof recall while your dog is running away from you then use the following approach:

Your goal is to train so that your dog is totally used to running away from you at top speed, and then turning on a dime to run *toward* you when you give his recall cue.

Kathy Sdao uses the following method of developing the distracter proof recall:

"The key is setting the training situation up so that you have total control over the distracters. I practice this exercise by throwing a tennis ball away from my fetch-addicted dog. I have an assistant standing ~30 or 40 feet away, and I aim the ball to land near him. At the instant the ball leaves my hand, I call out "Effie, come!" If she turns toward me, I click and then back up several steps quickly, creating even more distance between the coveted ball and us. Then I feed her generously. If Effie ignores my recall and continues toward the thrown object, my assistant simply picks the ball up and ignores Effie's protests. When Effie eventually returns to me (which she will because she's getting no +R from the assistant), I praise her, but don't feed. Pretty soon, Effie will start to respond to a recall off of a thrown ball, and I'll want to start mixing in occasional trials where I throw the ball but don't call her. I want to make sure I don't lose her enthusiasm for retrieving (i.e., I don't want a thrown ball to become a recall cue!).

I'll increase the difficulty of the recall:

- 1.. when I can successfully alternate trials of throw the ball, give recall cue immediately, click her for turning toward me, back up and feed her,
 - 2.. with trials of throw the ball, remain quiet/give no recall cue, click her for picking up the ball or for returning with the ball, and feed her.
- I'll wait a few seconds after throwing the ball before I call her. In other words, I'll let her get closer to the "prey." If she fails to respond to the recall cue, my assistant will pick up the ball, as usual. Gradually shape this recall behavior so that you can call the dog even when she's so close to the ball she can almost grab it.

A couple of practical tips:

- 1) If your aim isn't so great, use an object that doesn't roll so much (a stick, a Frisbee).
- 2) If the dog isn't very toy motivated, throw a chunk of food that will show up against the ground (piece of bagel, tortellini)

3) Click the moment the dog turns away from the "prey," at least in the early stages of training. Don't wait until the dog returns to you.

Once the dog's body is very fluent at switching directions in the middle of a predatory-type chase, try setting up the situation so that the distracter object is more like real life. Have your assistant drive a car or a bike, if the dog is a vehicle-chaser, or have a dog (or a very brave cat) with him. And until your training gets to this level, don't let the dog off-leash in a situation in which you don't have control of the distracters. Don't set the dog up to fail, and don't allow her to rehearse the problem behavior. She has to learn to wade before you throw her into the deep end."