



DOG PARK RECALL GUIDE

Objective

This guide will help you master the art of recall with your dog, particularly in the stimulating environment of a dog park. Reliable recall isn't just convenient—it's essential for your companion's safety and the well-being of all park users.

Why read this document before your next visit to the park?

- Ensuring the safety of your dog and others
 - Prevent conflicts between dogs
 - Enjoy the park experience to the fullest without stress
 - Build a trusting relationship with your pet
 - Respect other users and their dogs
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Why is recall so important?

At the dog park

Dog parks are exciting but unpredictable environments. Your dog may be distracted by:

- Other dogs playing
- Fascinating smells
- Owners giving treats
- Situations that could escalate

A good recall allows you to intervene quickly if necessary, whether it's to avoid a conflict, prevent your dog from jumping on someone, or simply because it's time to leave.

The consequences of a poor recall

- Stress for you and your dog

- Risk of incident or fight
- Frustration for other owners
- Possible exclusion from the park
- Development of bad habits in your dog

The basics of effective recall

⚠ IMPORTANT: Progression is essential!

The dog park is NOT the place to start recall training!

It is the most distracting environment possible for a dog: other dogs running, barking, and playing, fascinating smells everywhere, owners with treats, emotions running high. Trying to teach recall directly at the dog park is like trying to learn to drive directly on the highway during rush hour!

Your dog **MUST** master recall in these environments **BEFORE** going to the park:

1. **At home** (living room, kitchen, fenced yard)
2. **In the backyard** without distractions
3. **On walks** in quiet areas
4. **In regular parks** with a few distractions
5. **Near other dogs** but at a distance
6. **Only AFTER** → Dog park

The fundamentals

1. Positive reinforcement Your dog must associate coming back to you with something pleasant. Never punish a dog that comes back, even if it took a while or did something wrong beforehand. NEVER call your dog back for something it doesn't like (bathing, nail clipping, scolding).

2. One command, one time Choose a clear word for the recall ("Come," "Here," etc.) and say it only ONCE. If you constantly repeat " "Come... come... COME!", your dog will learn that repetition is part of the command and will wait until you have said the word three times before moving.

3. Call at the right time only NEVER call your dog if you are not sure he will come. It is better not to use the command than to put your dog in a situation where he will fail. If your dog ignores your recall, he learns that it is optional.

4. Your attitude makes all the difference. Your dog reads your emotions like an open book. Use a cheerful and welcoming voice, even if you are frustrated. Your dog should be EAGER to come to you, not afraid of your reaction.

5. Never show the rewards Never show your dog that you have treats or toys on you. Hide them in your pockets. On the day you don't have anything, your dog must still come back.

What to avoid

✗ Never do the following:

- Yell or use an aggressive tone
- Run after your dog (he will think it's a play)
- Punish your dog when he finally comes back
- Repeating the recall command several times
- Use recall only for unpleasant things (leaving, bathing, etc.)
- Showing treats or toys before calling
- Calling your dog when you're not sure he'll come
- Use your dog's name if you say it too often during the day

✓ Instead, do the following:

- Use a cheerful and encouraging tone
- Crouch down to appear less threatening
- Reward generously each time they come (even if it's late)
- Say the command only once, then wait patiently
- Practice recall for fun things too
- Hide your rewards in your pockets
- Only call if you are confident of the outcome
- Keep your energy positive even if you are frustrated

Training progress BEFORE the dog park

Important legal and safety considerations

Follow municipal regulations First and foremost, find out about your municipality's regulations regarding dogs running free. In City of Gatineau and most cities, dogs must be kept on a leash (6 feet or less) at all times in public spaces, except in designated dog parks. Violating these regulations can result in fines and puts your dog and others at risk.

Choose safe environments

When training your dog to come when called, always use safe, enclosed spaces:

- Your fenced backyard
- A friend's or family member's private property, with their permission
- Dog training centers with enclosed spaces
- Dog parks ONLY when your dog has already mastered recall

The essential tool: the leash Until your dog is 100% reliable when recalling, use a leash (6 to 15 meters long) during training in a safe environment. This tool allows you to:

- Maintain control even from a distance
- Prevent your dog from "choosing" to disobey
- Practice safely in larger spaces
- Guide gently without yelling or running after your dog

Important: Never remove the leash until your dog reliably returns 95% of the time in the current training environment.

Why this progression is crucial

The dog park represents the "expert" level of distractions for a dog. Bringing a dog there that has not yet mastered recall in simpler environments is setting them up for failure. Worse still, it can create bad habits that are very difficult to correct later on.

Consequences of going too fast:

- Your dog learns to ignore your recall

- He associates the park with "doing whatever he wants"
- Your stress increases and is transmitted to the dog
- Risk of incidents with other dogs
- Loss of mutual trust

Step 1: mastery at home (minimum 2 weeks of training for 5 to 30 minutes per day)

Objective: Immediate recall 95% of the time

Environment: Home, fenced yard **Distractions:** Minimal (TV, kitchen noises)

Success criteria: Your dog comes immediately 19 times out of 20

Step 2: Controlled outings (minimum 2 weeks of training for 5 to 30 minutes per day)

Objective: Maintain recall despite minor distractions

Environment: Quiet streets, parks with few people **WITH LEASH** (12-15 meters)

Distractions: Smells, a few passersby, bicycles **Required equipment:** High-quality leash and comfortable harness **Success criteria:** Reliable recall even with moderate distractions, leash relaxed 90% of the time

Step 3: proximity to other dogs (minimum 2 weeks of training for 5 to 30 minutes per day)

Objective: Effective recall even in the presence of other dogs

Environment: Secure areas near other dogs on leashes **WITH LEASH** **Distractions:** Dogs visible but at a safe distance (minimum 10 meters) **Required equipment:** Leash and high-value rewards **Success criteria:** Can take their eyes off another dog to come back to you.

Safety tip: Choose times and places where other dogs are calm and well controlled by their owners. Avoid reactive or overly excited dogs.

✅ **Only NOW: the dog park**

Total prior training time: minimum 6 weeks of daily training **Sign that your dog is ready:** He responds to your recall even when he is intently watching another dog 10-20 meters away.

Bonus step: practice with your dog on a leash in environments similar to the park

Before going to the dog park, practice with your dog on a leash in places with similar distractions:

- **Children's parks** (children running and shouting)
- **Outdoor shopping centers** (lots of movement)
- **Community events** (crowds, smells, noises)
- **Sports fields** during games (exciting atmosphere)
- **Public markets** (intense sensory stimulation)

The goal: Your dog must be accustomed to paying attention to you even in highly stimulating environments. The more he practices in a variety of contexts, the better he will behave at the dog park.

Final test before visiting the park

Before your first visit to the dog park, do this test:

1. Go to the park fence (outside) **with your dog on a leash**
2. Let your dog observe the activity for 2-3 minutes
3. Call him once
4. If he comes immediately without pulling on the leash → you're ready!
5. If he hesitates or ignores you → continue training somewhere other than the park.

Golden rule: Never remove the leash until your dog has passed this test 5 times in a row, at different times of the day.

Specific techniques for dog parks

Before entering the park

Assessing the environment Observe what is happening in the park:

- Are there many dogs?
- Does the atmosphere seem calm or hyperactive?
- Are there any situations that could distract your dog?

The purpose of this assessment is to **determine the chances of success of your recall and the risks of conflict!**

Once in the park

1. The First Few Minutes

- Stay near the entrance for the first few minutes
- Let him gradually get used to the environment

2. Preventive recalls Don't wait until there is a problem to call your dog back. Use "preventive" recalls with the **"Call-Release" technique**

- Call your dog: "Max, come!"
- Praise your dog when he comes
- Release him immediately: "Go play!"
- This teaches him that coming back doesn't always mean leaving...

What to do if your dog doesn't come back?

Immediate strategies

1. Don't panic Stay calm. Dogs sense our stress, and this can make them even less inclined to come back. The stress you might impose on your dog (shouting, gesticulating) could even be the last straw that triggers a fight with other dogs.

2. Change your strategy

- Try moving away from your dog instead of approaching it
- Sit or crouch down to call him or get his attention
- Pretend to look at something interesting on the ground
- Change your position in the park to get his attention

- Use a cheerful and enthusiastic tone, never a harsh or angry one

3. Use the environment and help from others

- Head toward the park exit (dogs often follow out of curiosity)
- Ask other owners to call their dogs back to reduce distractions

Expert tip: It's better to leave early when things are still going well rather than waiting until your dog is too distracted or overexcited. This will give you better control over your dog.

Final tips

★ The most important message in this guide

DON'T GO TO THE DOG PARK UNTIL YOU'RE READY!

This is the biggest mistake dog owners make. The dog park is not the place to learn—it's the place to demonstrate what your dog already knows perfectly well. If your dog doesn't reliably come back to you in your living room, he certainly won't come back when there are 10 dogs running around him!

Take the time you need. It's better to wait three more months and have a perfectly trained dog than to create bad habits that will take years to correct.

Understand your dog's "place habits"

Your dog develops different expectations depending on where he is. If his "habit" in a given place is to act crazy and ignore humans, he will be surprised if you suddenly ask him to pay attention. That's why you need to practice recall in ALL types of environments, not just at home.

The rule of "unnecessary" recalls

For every time you recall your dog for something boring (going home, leaving the park, ending playtime), do 3-4 "unnecessary" recalls where you praise him and immediately release him with a "Go play!". This way, coming back to you becomes a positive experience in his mind.

Your attitude is your most powerful tool

At the dog park, you won't have any treats or toys. Your enthusiastic voice, positive body language, and joyful energy are your only "rewards." If you can't motivate your dog with your mere presence and attitude, then your relationship isn't strong enough for the dog park yet.

Don't hesitate to ask for help

If you are experiencing persistent difficulties with recall, check out a qualified dog trainer BEFORE going to the park. The SPCA de l'Outaouais recommends finding a trainer among the members of the Regroupement québécois des intervenants en éducation canine (rqiec.com).

Wait until your dog is mature and fully trained before considering the dog park.

Together, let's create dog parks that are safe and enjoyable for everyone!