DOG PLUS ME · THE FIX SERIES · NO. 07

The Recall Fix

The step-by-step plan for a dog who comes back when called, at home, in the park and near the things they love to chase. For teenage dogs, adults and rescues.

Reward-based | The 4-C Check | 14 real-life situations | 10 printables



DOGPLUSME.COM · EDITION 1.0 · 2026

START HERE · 2 MINUTES

You don't need to read this whole guide before your next walk.

You need the parts that match your dog. Find yourself below and follow that path. Everything else is there when you need it.

IF THIS IS YOU…	READ THIS, IN THIS ORDER
I'm scared I'll lose him	Tonight's rule: the line stays on (Ch. 1). That's enough for today. Tomorrow, the 4-C Check (Ch. 2), then the Safety Line (Ch. 3).
Bolts from fear, lunges or growls, or has caught an animal	Part 4, "When to get help", first. These need a professional. The line stays on until then.
Came every time at 4 months, now doesn't	Situation 1. Then the Recall Map (Ch. 6): go back one zone and win there first. This dip is normal.
Runs to other dogs, or won't leave the park	The Better-Than Menu (Ch. 4) and "Come back, go back" → Situation 2 for other dogs, Situation 3 for the park.
Squirrels, deer, scents or speed	The 4-C Check (Ch. 2) → Situation 4 for sight chasers, 5 for scent dogs, 6 for sighthounds.
Walks near sheep, cattle or horses	Situation 7 → Printable 8. On a short leash around farm animals, every time. General information only, never legal advice.
An older dog who "stopped listening"	Vet first, then Situation 12. Hearing and thinking get checked before any retraining.
Got lost, or nearly did	Situation 13 and Printable 9, the Lost Dog First-Hour Plan. Check the ID tag and microchip details today.

How this guide is different

- **It finds the why first.** Can't, Competition, Cue or Context, plus the red routes that need different help. The 4-C Check (Ch. 2) tells you which.
- **It gives you rules, not vibes.** How long the line is, when to move on, and exactly what to do when your dog doesn't come.
- **It has a plan B.** For the dog who dodges your hand, the dog who "doesn't care about treats", and walks where a long line feels impossible.
- **It's kind.** No chasing, no scolding when your dog finally arrives, and no shock, vibration or tone collars of any kind.

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

Every recommendation is based on published guidance from veterinary hospitals and associations, welfare charities and peer-reviewed research, in plain steps. Where sources disagree, we take the safer, welfare-first position. Where a rule is our own, we say so. Sources are listed at the back. This guide is educational and doesn't replace your vet.

HONEST EXPECTATIONS

What's normal: honest timelines

You'll see courses promising recall "in just 28 days", or a guarantee. We won't. No reliable source gives a number of days or weeks to a reliable recall, so we don't invent one. Here's what the sources do say.

WHEN	WHAT'S HAPPENING	WHAT'S NORMAL
About 6–18 months	Adolescence: the teenage dip, or "selective hearing"	In one large UK study of young dogs, owners' reports of recall problems rose from 6 months, peaked at 12 months and fell by 18 months (owners' reports only). One study found teenage dogs went through a passing phase of listening less to their own person. It passed (young guide-dog candidates)
A rescue's first 6 months	Settling in, getting confident	One study found owner-rated chasing rose over the first 6 months after adoption (one US shelter group). Keep the line on as your dog settles
Charging the Jackpot Word	A rare emergency word, practiced close (Ch. 7)	About 5 times a day for about a week, or until your dog anticipates the treats. A practice schedule, not a fix date
Everyday practice	Short calls, spread out	At least 10 short reps a day. Recall is "a lifelong training skill"
Parks, other dogs and wildlife	The hardest places on the Recall Map (Ch. 6)	Parks, other dogs and wildlife take months, and some dogs always need a line near prey. That's normal
An older dog who "stopped listening"	Hearing or thinking may be changing	Hearing loss in older dogs is usually gradual and can be hard to notice. Vet first, before any retraining (Part 4)

These are findings and practice schedules from the sources, not promises. A sudden change in recall, chasing or escaping needs a vet visit before any training.

OUR HONEST ANSWER TO "WILL HE EVER BE OFF-LEASH?"

Maybe. Maybe not. Both are OK. RSPCA Australia says plainly: "A 100% reliable recall is unrealistic." Some breeds were bred to chase or follow scent, so expect to work harder and manage longer. Any dog can chase. Some dogs may never be safe off-leash in open country. A long line, fenced fields and sniff walks are a full, good life.

Our standard: "recall-ready"

"Recall-ready" is our own standard, not a vet or charity one. Your dog is recall-ready when:

- [ ] 8 of 10 fast recalls on the Safety Line in a Busy zone, on 3 separate walks
- [ ] your dog checks in on their own on every walk
- [ ] the Jackpot Word is charged (Ch. 7)
- [ ] every recall still earns something

A fast recall is our definition too: one call, and your dog comes straight to you. 8 of 10 is 80%, RSPCA Australia's off-leash bar on a long leash in highly distracting places. Using it for every zone is our own extension. Until then, your dog is "in training". Recall-ready is a threshold for trying a safe area, not a promise. Before you unclip, use the off-leash check on Printable 8.

Three things that will happen (and are normal)

1. **The teenage dip.** The puppy who came every time at 4 months starts acting "selectively deaf". It's a phase. Keep the line on and keep playing (Situation 1).
2. **A great walk, then a bad one.** It's not failure. It's data. When recall breaks in a zone, you go back one zone on the Recall Map and win there first (our own rule; Ch. 6).
3. **Perfect in the kitchen, gone in the park.** Recall doesn't carry over to a new place by itself. Each zone gets taught, one at a time (Ch. 6).

READ THIS IF YOU FEEL ASHAMED

You're not raising a runaway.

Maybe you've called until your voice cracked, sure you were "going to lose him forever". Owners say "it's mortifying!" and "I am so upset and ashamed of him and myself".

You haven't failed, and your dog isn't bad. Here's why.

Coming back has to pay

Every call is a choice for your dog: come to you, or keep having fun. Chasing and sniffing are "self-rewarding", says Dogs Trust. The fun pays your dog all by itself. So coming back has to pay more. The RSPCA puts it simply: "you must learn to be more exciting than the rest of the world!"

A squirrel is very exciting. This guide shows you how to compete.

It isn't stubbornness, and it isn't dominance. Your dog isn't testing who's boss. The "pack leader" idea is wrong, and veterinary behavior groups reject it. You don't need to win. You need to pay more than the squirrel.

> NO SHOCK, VIBRATION OR TONE COLLARS, EVER
>
> The best trials of recall training found reward-based trainers did at least as well, often better, without the welfare costs. Ch. 7 explains the evidence and why we leave these out.

How to start again

1. **Put the line on.** A long line on a harness wherever recall isn't proven (Ch. 3).
2. **Stop calling when you'd lose the bet.** Every failed call teaches your dog the word is optional.
3. **Find the leak.** Run the 4-C Check (Ch. 2). The fix depends on the cause.
4. **Pick one set of rules for the whole home.** Say it once. Never chase. Never punish a recall, however late (Ch. 8).

THIS IS AN EVERYDAY RECALL PROBLEM

- Comes at home, not in the park
- Looks at you, then runs to the dog, the scent or the squirrel
- Came every time as a puppy, now "selectively deaf"

GET HELP IF

- Bolts from noises, hides, or ducks away from hands
- Lunges, growls or snaps at dogs or people; has caught or injured an animal
- A sudden change, stiffness, or an older dog who no longer turns to sounds

Right-hand column? That's not your failure either. It means a vet check first, then the right professional. Part 4, "When to get help", says who to call.

THE ONE THING TO REMEMBER

It's OK to keep the line on. "I do sometimes wish I could let her off," one owner wrote, and most of us have felt that. That's not giving up. It's how recall gets built, safely. You're reading this page, so you're already doing better than you think.

CONTENTS

What's inside

PART 1 · THE FIX ON ONE PAGE

1 **Today: when your dog won't come** 11
What to do in the moment, and the 4 rules for today

2 **The 4-C Check** 15
Can't, Competition, Cue or Context, the red routes, and the first move for each

PART 2 · THE SYSTEM

3 **The Safety Line** 19
Harness, line, gloves, ID tag and microchip, and how to hold it all

4 **The Better-Than Menu** 24
Rewards that beat the rival, and "Come back, go back"

5 **The Recall Word & Games at Home** 29
A fresh word, the arm signal, and the games that charge it

6 **The Recall Map** 35
Five zones, house to wild, and check-ins on every walk

7 **The Jackpot Word** 41
A rare emergency word, charged for the day you need it

8 **Kids, Family & Dog Walkers** 46
One word and one set of rules for everyone who holds the line

9 **The 14-Day Plan** 52
Day by day, with check-ins on the way to recall-ready

PART 3 · FIX IT FOR YOUR SITUATION

→ **Find your dog. Fix that.** 59
Match what you're seeing to the right situation

S1 **The teenager with "selective hearing"** 61
Came every time at 4 months

S2 **Runs straight to other dogs** 64

S3 Won't leave the dog park 67

S4 Squirrels, rabbits & deer 70
The sight chaser

S5 Nose down & gone: scent dogs 73

S6 Sighthounds & other sprinters 76

S7 Near sheep, cattle & farmland 79
General information only

S8 Comes close, then dodges your hand 82

S9 "He doesn't care about treats" 85

S10 Chases joggers, bikes & kids playing 88

S11 The rescue who's never been off leash 91

S12 The older dog who "stopped listening" 94
Vet first

S13 Bolts out of sight, or got lost 97
With the first-hour plan

S14 "A long line won't work where we walk" 100

PART 4 · TOOLS

T When to get help 103
Red routes, warning signs, and who to call

P 10 Printables 106
4-C Check Card · Better-Than Menu · Recall Map Tracker · Safety Line Card · Jackpot Word Charging Log · Household Recall Rules · Walk Game Card · Off-Leash Readiness & Countryside Check · Lost Dog First-Hour Plan · 14-Day Tracker

✓ What's next 117
Life after recall-ready, getting help, the rest of the series

§ Sources 119