

Teacher's Pet Sessions

Training Session 8 – “Here” - Getting a Reliable Recall! – 2

Pia Silvani: Hi. Welcome to *Teacher's Pet* on Pet Life Radio. This is Pia Silvani, director of training and behavior at Saint Hubert's Welfare Center in Madison New Jersey and your host. This week you will be expanding upon your recall. If you're not ready to move on, take a few weeks to ensure that your dog is moving toward you, sitting and not getting up until you release him. You could always come back to this lesson at a later date. Now when we think about a recall, a recall's a very complex behavior. There are many parts to the recall that can break down, causing the dog's recall basically to fall apart. A complex behavior, what I mean by that is it's a behavior that has many links. Think of it as a chain that has several links joined together to create one long chain. So over the next several weeks what you're going to do is you're going to work on each separate link. The three recall links, I like to call them, that you're going to work on is number one, teaching your dog to leave or come off a distraction. That's link number one. Link number two, the dog has now come off the distraction, but then suddenly he sees something along the way, so he needs to learn to pass by distractions. And then the third link to make a strong chain are distractions behind you. So the dog needs to learn, remember, to find your feet and sit and not suddenly decide to pass you by or run circles around you once he gets there. Once you have proofed and made all of these three links strong, then you can begin to put them together to make that strong change, or what I call, strong recall. In order for you to be successful you must make sure that your dog comes each and every time. So therefore, you either need to have him on a six-foot lead or my recommendation is to get a long line.

A long line is basically like a long leash. You can purchase them at any pet store. They're hooked up to your dogs collar, and they have them between 25, 30 and 50 feet, and basically your dog is just dragging that around. So your dog should not learn that he's quicker and more agile than you are. Then he thinks it's fun. Once he figures that out, that's his game, it's not your game. So he shouldn't figure out that he can have fun without you. You need to bring on the fun. This week what we're going to do is we're going to add distractions when calling your dog. So you're going to practice as you've learned in previous lessons. Remember that your dog should always look at you when you say his name prior to being called. If he does not look at you, he's not paying attention to you, and it's unlikely that he's going to respond when you say “Here” at this stage of his learning. Later on as he becomes more successful, yes, he doesn't automatically have to turn. So with my dogs for example, if I say their names and “Here”, they're really turning and anticipating a recall, so they're turning on their name. But I wouldn't expect that of your dogs at this stage of their learning. So before we begin our training session, what I'd like you to do is practice calling your dog to you several times, maybe no more than three, making sure that your dog is looking to you when you say his name, he's sitting in front of you and he's not getting up 'til you release him. Don't forget, give him wonderful treats and take a play break. Taking those play breaks are critical. So any time I work on any kind of behavior, I typically do it two or three times and then I take a short break and I play. I might do two or three times, I take a short break and I

play. I might do it one time, take a short break and play. So right now, we're going to take a short break, and when we return we'll get ready and we'll have some fun.

Pia Silvani: Welcome back. This is Pia Silvani, host of Teacher's Pet on Pet Life Radio. Thanks again for joining us. Today, as you know, we are going to be working on the next steps of "Here". To begin, when working with your dog make sure that you're always in a safe area; safe meaning fenced in area. You don't want to work close to a street, you want to make sure that your dog has a long line on for safety. If you cannot find an area that is safe, make sure that that long line is always on. If you're concerned, if you've got a dog that's a boulder, you might want to hold the end of the line. You can also put some knots in the line all along the way, so just in case you have to step on the line it doesn't slide through your shoe. Allow your dog to have some exercise, and whenever he returns to you and we get those free check-ins, make sure you reward him. So when you take him out play games like hide-and-seek, chase me and then you get rewarded. I'm always, if I'm in the backyard and I see my dogs get distracted, maybe they're sniffing the ground, I suddenly might take off around the house. And the dogs see me take off and they run and they catch up. So it's a fun game for the dogs. So I might always have a, maybe a tennis ball in my pocket, I might have Frisbees lying around the yard, so the dogs are always keeping an eye on me. So you can begin to call your dog to come when he's already on his way also. So say your dog is sniffing and then he sees you start to walk away and he comes running to you. You might all of a sudden suddenly say "Here". He's already offering the behavior, so you can add the queue, and then gradually you're going to begin to add mild distractions, making sure at all times that you can control the dog. So for example, if you call your dog when he's looking at something and he does not spin, step on the light line so he can't go to the distraction. As soon as he turns toward you, mark it with a yes, run away and lavish him with praise. So you want to encourage that chase. And gradually what you're going to do is you're going to increase the level of distractions. You could also ask a friend to help you by setting up distractions and having the friend remove them in case the dog is distracted. So to make sure your dog is successful, it's a good idea to take your dog out when he's hungry, if you're going to use food, if you're going to use play as a reward. What I would do is I would probably deprive him of play a little bit, don't play with him that morning if you know you're going to take him out in the afternoon to work with him. If he's just eaten or he's spent the last 20 minutes tugging or playing with the neighbors children, food and play will not be good enough reward for him, especially if you're planning on calling him off a person, a squirrel, deer droppings, another dog. So when you begin this exercise, always call him off low value distractions, while giving him high value rewards when he gets to you, not the other way around. Critical! So to increase your dog's reliability when you call him off distractions, you should randomly let the dog enjoy the distractions also. So for example, say I'm in the backyard and it's a fenced area and all of a sudden my dog sees a squirrel, and I call my dog, "Here, Buddy, here", and he comes running to me. What I might do is I might do a tug game and then send him back to the squirrel. Obviously the squirrel's up the tree at the time, so he can't get to it, but that's one way of teaching him that he can go back to the distraction. So what I'm going to have you do now is I'm going to have you start off by putting a distraction out of some sort that your dog wants. Low value. Something that he might just be interested in, but not really anything of high value. So it could be anything. You could toss out even just a sock on the ground. You can toss out a shoe. You can drop a piece of paper. Anything you think might distract the dog. So once he goes and he starts to sniff it, say your dog's name, "Here", and as soon as his head turns and he spins, that's when you're going to mark it with a yes. Take off and run to encourage him to come after you. And make sure he comes in, he sits and

then reward him. So again, anything you can find. If you're doing this outside it can be just the dog sniffing in the grass. It could be the dog looking at something. So remember distractions are anything that is obviously distracting the dog. The closer they are to the distraction, the more difficult it's going to be. So for example, if I'm working on this and say I want him to come off of a milk bone that I've placed down. What I might do is I might toss the milk bone out six feet in front of me, and when the dog takes one step towards the milk bone I'm going to say his name and "Here", take off and run. If he's nose to nose from the distraction, that's going to make it a lot more difficult. He will probably pick up the milk bone and coming running to you. However, you don't want him to get that close at this time. So randomly allow him to pick up the object. Again, if he's doing really well gradually then start to make the distractions a little bit more difficult as time goes on. Okay. So that's link number one. You will work on that entirely separate. So as you're working on that make sure that there are no distractions along the way and there are no distractions behind you, 'cause that's going to be links number two and number three.

Pia Silvani: So you want to continue proofing here, again, calling your dog off distractions. So what you're going to do as well, and now that your dog knows "wait", if you don't have someone to hold your dog what you can do is you can set the dog up by putting him in a "wait" and then setting up a distraction along the way. So as we talked about with "stay", there are set-ups that you can do when you're practicing alone, or you can use real life distractions, such as a squirrel running across the path, you're out in the field and, you know, there are geese droppings or maybe the scent of an animal that was in your yard the night before. So "here" does not mean move away from something, but stop along the way and have a little snack or meander at your dog's leisure. That's why you really want to encourage speed in your dog; the quicker the dog runs to you, the quicker he'll run past the distraction. So sort of think of it as, I always tell my students that you don't want the dog to window shop. If he's going at a slow pace he's able to window shop and might see that sale in the window and stop in. But however, if you think, "I'm late for the plane", and you're booking past the stores, you're moving fast, you might glance at that sales sign, you think, "I have no time because I have to get some place", that's the attitude that you want from your dog. So what you're going to do when you set up distractions along the way, you can put your dog in a "wait", provided he's got a reliable "wait", and you can put yourself probably 12 feet away from the dog. And now what you're going to do is you're going to place a distraction far off to the side in the middle between you and your dog. Not immediately along your dog's path, 'cause that's going to be easier for him to pick up. So basically what you're doing, lets pretend that your dog is, think of a pyramid; your dog is at one end of the bottom of the pyramid, you're at the other end of the bottom of the pyramid, and at the top of the pyramid away from your dog, at least ten feet away, in the middle is your distraction. And that can be anything. So you're going to place it down, you'll put your dog in a "wait", place your distraction down, again, at least ten feet off of the straight line, the straight path that your dog needs to come, and now you're another ten feet away. You're going to call your dog to "here". If at any moment that you think your dog is going to the distraction, you have your line on, you can quickly pick the line up and run off in the other direction or you can run in towards the dog so he doesn't get the distraction. So you need to beat him to the distraction. Now if you can't beat him, if he's a lot quicker than you are, what I've done many times also is I've put the distraction on a line. So lets say I have a tennis ball. I'm going to use the tennis ball as the distraction. What I will do is I will make a hole through the tennis ball, put a rope on it, so now I'm holding the rope. When I call the dog "here", if the dog is heading for the tennis ball I can quickly pull it away so the dog can't get at it.

You can also use, if you have a friend, family member, that person can be standing near the distraction and quickly take it away or step on it. So say for example you're using a treat as a distraction. So quickly the person can step on the treat so the dog can't get at it. If the dog passes the distraction and sits, you want to reward the dog, lots of rewards, and then periodically send him back to the distraction. So if you're using a treat for example, and that dog, he looks at it and he says, "Nope, got to get to my owner and sit", maximize your rewards, okay, play with them and then send him back to the treat, tell him to go get it or go find it. Now you don't want to do that every single time so your dog anticipates getting the treat or getting the distraction. It's up to you. So for example, if you want him to pass something, like deer droppings, maybe you don't want him to eat deer droppings, so you're not going to send him back each and every time, so he should not just assume that he's going back. However, you need to find something that's going to be better than deer droppings, which is not an easy task. So you really have to keep him busy, keep him focused once he gets to you, so he doesn't want to run back. So if you can put him in play mode, play mode seems to work a lot better than putting him, than just feeding the dog.

Pia Silvani: Alright, I'm going to go over now the last part is... you'll have plenty of time to work on these... these are distractions behind you. So you'll continue to work on the first two links. Remember, calling your dog off a distraction, having the dog pass by you, and now lastly what you're going to do is you're going to set up a distraction that's behind you. So easily what you can do, once again, you can either put your dog in a "wait", if you don't have anybody to work with. Or maybe your dog is just meandering around. You can all of a sudden put a distraction down behind you, you can drop it, and call your dog "here". If your dog should try to sidestep you to get the distraction, just sidestep him. So basically what you're doing is you're becoming a goalie. You're not allowing him to move to that distraction. If he comes in, he sits, reward him, and then give him an okay release and sometimes allow him to get the distraction. So for example, what I will do is my dog says, "You know, crazy about Frisbees", so what I will do is I will throw a Frisbee behind me. I will call my dogs "here", they know to move in, sit... Sometimes I'll pick the Frisbee up and then throw it to them. Other times I will send them to the Frisbee to have the Frisbee. Maybe I might have them pick the Frisbee up and not give it to the dog at all. So you want to make sure that you are inconsistent. You should, the dog, you should not be a predictable trainer. So lets try this, lets try setting one up. Again, if you need to, what you can do is you can put your dog in a "wait" if you don't have somebody that can hold your dog and have something that your dog might want, maybe your tug toy, try your tug toy, especially if your dog likes that tug toy. Or drop one of your treats behind. So you're going to call your dog "here", you're going to move maybe 15 feet away from your dog, make sure your dog sees that there is a distraction behind, call your dog "here", your dog should move in, directly sit in front of you, not try to pass you by. Once he's seated he must remain seated until you release him, and then it's your choice, either pick up the distraction, give it to the dog, step aside, let the dog take the distraction when you say "Take it", or pick the distraction up and not give it to the dog. But you need to be random with that. That's critical. So you can try that again, one more time. Again, you can, don't have to put your dog in a "wait", if he's just sniffing around, wait for him to start to sniff around. So maybe now you're calling him off a distraction, something that he's sniffing. Make sure that you have that long line on at all times so you can always ensure that you reinforce the dog moving towards you. If he doesn't respond right away, do not repeat "here". Say it once, but make sure he heard you. If you're working at a distance and your dog is not responding to his name, you may need to go back and work on saying his name when the dog is at a distance and

rewarding that. So remember, if your dog is sniffing something and you say his name, he should pick his head up. If your dog is eating his meal and you say his name, he should stop eating and pick his head up out of the bowl, okay. That's what it means. Doesn't mean that you're going to take the food away, just means that I said your name and I expect you to at least look at me, acknowledge that I said something. So maybe the recall is not the problem, it's that the dog is not paying attention and that you don't have a good response to the dog's name, so you might need to go back and work on that before you start to work on recall distractions.

Pia Silvani: So, have a seat and I'm going to go over some things for you to write down, some ideas for each of these. So we'll start off with link number one. When you're working on these, again, it can be some ideas that we like to use, the dog sniffing something, the dog looking at something, maybe the dog is greeting another dog and just about done greeting and you call the dog off, "Buddy here", and you take off and run. Maybe there is a guest at the door, and now the dog has greeted the guest, and you call the dog off a person. You might want to put an object down, such as maybe he's moving towards something. So he's moving towards an object that you want. Call him when he takes one step towards it, not when he's already there. It's perfect if you're on your walk and all of a sudden you see him up on his tiptoes, and he sees a squirrel for example, and you know that he's going to dart. Rather than being pulled off your feet, say his name, "here" and run in the other direction, so he learns to come off of things instead. If you're having trouble with that squirrel, and probably wildlife are going to be the most difficult, so you want to start off again with easy things and then gradually increase the level of the difficulty. You could have somebody hold a biscuit in their hand, let your dog sniff the biscuit. He should immediately come off of it when you call him. Now, distractions along the way; they can be set-ups as we talked about, so make sure you're starting off with distractions along the way. So say you're out walking your dog and you think, "Oh, hmm, there's a distraction right there. I want to see if I can call my dog past that." So calling him off a distraction, calling him past the distraction, and once he's getting good at it, move that distraction closer and closer and closer into the dog's path. So for example, what I might do is I might put my dog in a "wait", and I'm going to take a straight path away from my dog 20 feet. As I'm walking I might drop a treat along the way, and then I turn. The dog should not stop to pick that treat up. The dog should be running so fast that he almost says, "Oh shucks, I was going too fast to get that object." So your dog should be able to run over a distraction eventually. Not right away; again, don't go from simple arithmetic to calculus. Lastly, distractions behind you. Again, they can be set-ups or they can be, for example, when I had my Golden Retrievers, they love the children at the bus stop. So what I would do every morning is I would take them down to the bus stop and I would have the children behind me. So I would call my dog, "here", if the dog saw the reward was he got to greet the children. And then I made it a little bit more difficult. What I would do then is I would have the children clapping. So I'd call my dog, "here", the children were behind me and they were clapping a little bit, maybe sometimes they had a treat, maybe sometimes they were even saying his name. Just because they're saying his name does not mean the dog should pass you by. And if you elicit the help of children, they love to be involved in this, so that can be great fun. Maybe if the dog is really into tennis balls or other balls, have them bounce balls behind, have them bounce balls along the way, have them hold a tennis ball or a ball, and then have, call the dog off of it. If the dog comes to you, they can toss the ball. So those are just some ideas to give you. This is going to take some time. Again, don't expect this to be perfect. The older your dog gets, the more you've conditioned your dog to always respond, the more reliable he will be, okay. So I never expect a really, really reliable

recall from a very young dog. It's just probably not going to happen, especially when they're in their adolescent stage. And adolescence usually ends somewhere in between, usually females around two, males around three, but remember the larger the breed, the longer the adolescence, so they're going to be a little bit of challenging.

Pia Silvani: So unfortunately we're out of time. Don't forget to check back for training session number nine. As always, a special thanks to our producers for making the show happen. Please go to PetLifeRadio.com and click on *Teacher's Pet*. Also please feel free, if you have any questions, comments or special ideas that you would like me to cover on the show, I'll be more than happy to answer them and you can email me at pia@petliferadio.com. So until next time, this is Pia signing off. Thank you again for your interest in Pet Life Radio. We appreciate it.

© Copyright 2009 PetLifeRadio, LLC

No part of this transcript may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without the written permission of Pet Life Radio.