

## Teach Your German Shepherd Dog More Commands

**Effective dog training starts with learning basic commands like come, and heel.**

### TEACHING COME

If you make teaching “Come” a fun experience, you should never have a student that does not love the game or that fails to come when called. The secret, it seems, is never to teach the word “come.”

At times when an owner most wants his dog to come when called, the owner is likely upset or anxious and he allows these feelings to come through in the tone of his voice when he calls his dog. Hearing that desperation in his owner’s voice, the dog fears the results of going to him and therefore either disobeys outright or runs in the opposite direction. The secret, therefore, is to teach the dog a game and, when you want him to come to you, simply play the game. It is practically a no-fail solution!

To begin, have several members of your family take a few food treats and each go into a different room in the house. Take turns calling the dog, and each person should celebrate the dog’s finding him with a treat and lots of happy praise. When a person calls the dog, he is actually inviting the dog to find him and get a treat as a reward for “winning.”

A few turns of the “Where are you?” game and the dog will figure out that everyone is playing the game and that each person has a big celebration awaiting his success at locating them. Once the dog learns to love the game, simply calling out “Where are you?” will bring him running from wherever he is when he hears that all-important question.

The come command is recognized as one of the most important things to teach a dog, so it is interesting to note that there are trainers who work with thousands of dogs and never teach the actual word “come.” Yet these dogs will race to respond to a person who uses the dog’s name followed by “Where are you?” In one instance, for example, a woman has a 12-year-old companion dog who went blind, but who never fails to locate her owner when asked, “Where are you?”

Children particularly love to play this game with their dogs. Children can hide in smaller places like a shower stall or bathtub, behind a bed or under a table. The dog needs to work a little bit harder to find these hiding places, but, when he does, he loves to celebrate with a treat and a tussle with a favorite youngster.

### TEACHING HEEL

Heeling means that the dog walks beside the owner without pulling. It takes time and patience on the owner’s part to succeed at teaching the dog that he (the owner) will not proceed unless the dog is walking calmly beside him. Pulling out ahead on the leash is definitely not acceptable.

Begin with holding the leash in your left hand as the dog sits beside your left leg. Hold the loop end of the leash in your right hand but keep your left hand short on the leash so it keeps the dog close to you.

Say “Heel” and step forward on your left foot. Keep the dog close to you and take three steps. Stop and have the dog sit next to you in what we now call the heel position. Praise verbally, but do not touch the dog. Hesitate a moment and begin again with “Heel,” taking three steps and stopping, at which point the dog is told to sit again.

Your goal here is to have the dog walk those three steps without pulling on the leash. When he will walk calmly beside you for three steps without pulling, increase the number of steps you take to five. When he will walk politely beside you while you take five steps, you can increase the length of your walk to ten steps. Keep increasing the length of your stroll until the dog will walk quietly beside you without pulling as long as you want him to heel. When you stop heeling, indicate to the dog that the exercise is over by verbally praising as you pet him and say “Okay, good dog.” The “Okay” is used as a release word, meaning that the exercise is finished and the dog is free to relax.

If you are dealing with a dog who insists on pulling you around, simply “put on your brakes” and stand your ground until the dog realizes that the two of you are not going anywhere until he is beside you and moving at your pace, not his. It may take some time just standing there to convince the dog that you are the leader and you will be the one to decide on the direction and speed of your travel.

Each time the dog looks up at you or slows down to give a slack leash between the two of you, quietly praise him and say, “Good heel. Good dog.” Eventually, the dog will begin to respond and within a few days he will be walking politely beside you without pulling on the leash. Atfirst, the training sessions should be kept short and very positive; soon the dog will be

able to walk nicely with you for increasingly longer distances. Remember also to give the dog free time and the opportunity to run and play when you are done with heel practice.

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