

Dog runs off into other people's yards

Dog call training is key to stopping the problem.

September Morn

Q. I have a 9-month-old dog named Bandit who is almost as small as a Chihuahua, and very energetic. He runs off into other people's yards if he sees a dog there or just because he wants to run around. I call for him and offer him treats, but the only thing that works is when I say very playfully, "Come here, Bandit!" and then run away toward the house. That's the only time he comes. He does this almost every day. Is he bored? Stubborn? What should I do?

A. Bored, possibly. Dogs do what works for them, and for Bandit, running off and refusing to come when you call works because it has a hugely entertaining payoff. He's found a reliable way to get you to run around and be playful. Your dog needs to learn that's not going to work any more. And to teach him that, you'll need to control his environment better.

He needs to realize that his days of running off and teasing you are over. Bandit cannot be permitted to run off, which means you'll need to walk him and play with him outdoors on leash or put up some kind of fence to keep him home.

You also need to teach your dog to come when you call. Start training this in the house where he's not distracted. Call him 10 times a day, when you don't really need him, just to give him a nice reward. But don't call 10 times in a row. Space the mini training sessions throughout the day. You can reward him with treats, toys, games, walks, and other things that Bandit really likes.

This combination of management and training will help Bandit lose the unpleasant habit of running off and gain the excellent (and rewarding) habit of coming when called.