

Emergency Stop for Sighthounds

You know that moment when your dog has managed to shake his muzzle off/slip his lead/ shoot through someone's legs and out of the front door/seen a Jack Russell in the distance and you need an emergency STOP procedure? Well, here is one.

It takes time to build up and you need to do it properly so I have tried to write a step by step guide. Don't miss steps because it won't work. It takes a few weeks to set up but it only takes about 10 seconds each day.

1. Buy a sports whistle – not a dog whistle, the sound is too soft. Put some string on it so you can hang it round your neck. Away from your dogs ear shot practice blowing a short loud piercing BEEP!!!! It needs to be a peremptory sound that even makes you jump when you do it!
2. Identify a treat which, in your dog's eyes, is the best treat in the world. A high value LARGE treat. I use dental sticks. From now on this treat will not be given at any other time than at a once daily training moment and later, when the training is in place, for an emergency stop. (If you really can't find a treat that your dog loves. try finding a favourite toy for a few minutes play that you will keep just for this moment and put away afterwards).
3. ONCE a day, at the same time each day, call your dog to the cupboard in the kitchen where you keep the treat and give the treat. If you have more than one dog, call them all and give out a treat each. It is often easier with more than one dog as they all want to be first and no one wants to miss out! As you give each dog its treat, take hold of its collar for a second or two. This is so they don't learn to take the treat and run when you need to catch them.
4. After 3 – 5 days they will know where you keep the treat and begin to anticipate when you walk to the cupboard. From now on, beep the whistle as you walk to the cupboard (remember, the beep should always be short, sharp and shocking!!!).
5. We are doing this in the kitchen because there are no other distractions. Don't do it when something exciting is happening in the kitchen or anywhere else. We are creating a situation where the dog can't fail to understand that BEEP! = BEST TREAT! Don't forget this is only once a day (because we don't want to trivialise it). The best treat is never used at any other time (because we don't want to trivialise it) and we always take hold of the dog's collar for a few seconds when we give the treat.
6. Once the dogs are arriving in a slavering heap at your feet the moment you reach for the whistle (about a week on), change the time of day. Start waiting until they are in another room or the garden before summoning them with a short sharp BEEP for the treat. If they mug you at the usual time for their treat, DO NOT GIVE IN but ignore them and walk away. This is introducing the "Lotto" principle will I/won't I get a prize? Will it /won't it be now? Your dogs will soon be watching you every time you put your hand near your whistle, or walk past the cupboard, or go in the kitchen. YOU NOW HAVE THEIR FULL ATTENTION!
7. Pop the treat for the day in your pocket, the whistle round your neck and begin to do the daily treat summons in different places – in the garden, or on a walk (dog still on lead so you can't fail), or in a small secure place off lead where no other distractions exist.

8. When you reach the stage where your dog is nosing about in the hedgerow but arrives at your feet the second after you beep the whistle you know you have created your emergency stop procedure and from now on you need that whistle round your neck and that treat in your pocket for the awful moment when things begin to go pear shaped.
9. NEVER use this as an everyday recall, it will become trivialised.
10. Keep up your once a day training for ever. Keep the lotto principle (When? Where? Will I get my special treat?). It doesn't matter if they miss a week while you are away but reintroduce it as soon as you come back.
11. If your dog doesn't come at the first beep one day do not beep again. And don't give a treat. Take the training back a stage, to the kitchen and make it foolproof again.

If you get this right and never overuse it - it works with nearly all sight hounds. Try to judge the moment before things go pear shaped – you have more chance of success then. You will find that your dog may be on his way to chase next door's Jack Russell..... You BEEP the whistle. Your dog veers off and turns towards you, you hold up the treat saying "come on" encouragingly, even show him the whistle. He makes that decision to keep coming, you take hold of his collar (and put the lead on) while you give him the treat.....and on his face is a look that says "What am I doing here? I was going to chase next door's Jack Russell!" Give him all the praise in the world for making the right decision.