

# No! No! No! • Why don't you EVER listen to me?

## How to Talk So Your Dog Will Listen

### Pitch matters

Voice commands are an important part of controlling your dog's behavior. But when it comes to getting Spot to do what you want, it's not just *what* you say, it's *how* you say it!

Take pitch. Dogs perceive high or squeaky noises as excited, friendly or appeasing. On the other hand, low, growly noises are interpreted as authoritative or inhibiting. So controlling your pitch is an important part of getting your message across.

Saying *Spot, Come!* In a low, loud growl is the perfect way to make sure Spot stays at least 10 yards away from you. After all, you just told him, in dog speak, that you're going to bite him if he gets anywhere near you!

On the other hand, telling Spot *NO!* in a high, wavering voice gives him the message *Yes, wasn't that fun! Let's do it again!* Or he may think you've just told him, *Gosh, I really don't want you to do that, but since I'm just a little puppy, I'm afraid to interfere.* Either way, it's hardly a message that will get Spot to stop chewing on and electric cord.

So, give your verbal commands in a tone your dog will understand.

- Give verbal corrections – *No! Off!* – in a low, growly but not necessarily loud pitch.
- Give affirmative commands – like *Come!* – in a bit higher and more animated tone.
- Give inhibiting commands – like - *Stay!* – in a low-pitched, flat or slowly descending tone. (*Staaaay!*)

### Keep your commands brief

How long or short your command is also can be critical to getting the response you want. A single, one word command is best. Be careful to avoid giving long lectures like *No Spot, I told you never to get on the couch, Nononononwhydon'tyouEVERlistentome?!*

In this case, you probably lost Spot somewhere around the third word. And, as far as Spot is concerned, you're simply communicating that you're a psycho! He'll just wish you go away so he can get on with this great new game of jumping on the couch and chewing on the pillows.

### Rev him up-or calm him down

When you correct your dog, you're trying to elicit a startle response, not beat your dog with your voice! So give your verbal corrections in short, abrupt notes, spoken in a low and growly voice.

But if you want Spot to jump into action—for instance, when you give him a stimulating signal, like *Come!* – use rapidly repeated, short words, rising in pitch: Say *pup, pup, pup!* While clapping your hands or using short, rising whistles.

My research found that a series of short, repeated, repeated notes actually *stimulate* movement. So slap your leg, clap your hands, tap the ground, and/or make smooching noises to get that pup moving! (Keep in mind that my research didn't predict where they'd go once stimulated, so you still have to teach your dog to come to you rather than go chase the cows when you make the noises!)

On the other hand, the only time I use long, extended words is when I want to slow down or soothe an animal. I say *Staaaaay* or *Gooooood Dog* when I want to inhibit movement or keep a dog quiet.

### Adding visual signals to commands

Calling Spot to come to you is a perfect example of how to use both visual and sound signals.

Dogs love to chase moving things, so get Spot's attention with hand claps or smooches, and *start to run away from him* as you continue making your stimulating signals. Call *Spot, Come!* Just before he begins to come to you.

If he runs toward say, say *Good Dog!* In a relatively high pitch, with lots of modulation or up and down notes in your voice. Keep running (visual signal), clapping and smooching (acoustic signals). Eventually bend down and over in a doggy play bow (another visual signal).

Compare that with standing straight up, stock still, and belting out a drill sergeant's version of *Come!* Which would you come to?

### Timing is everything

When you give your verbal signal is important, too. Use the same timing for all signals. Just as with *Come!* it's important to say *Sit!* Just *before* he begins to sit, and *Down!* just *before* he starts to lie down – not a second or two after. This takes some practice, but it's far superior to shouting out a command after Spot's already done doing it.

Adapted from *Beginning Family Dog Training*, by Patricia McConnell, Ph.D., co-host of *Calling All Pets*. Trisha's books are available through *The Radio Store* at 1-800-747-7444. Calling all Pets at [www.wpr.org/pets](http://www.wpr.org/pets).