

KiwiDogAgility

by Karen de Wit

AGILITY FOUNDATION TRAINING

Before your puppy sees any agility equipment you should ensure you are on the right track as far as the basics are concerned. This means:

Socialisation/habituation

Does your dog interact with other dogs, animals and people in an acceptable manner, even strangers? Agility dogs will see a variety of strange dogs and people in often stressful situations such as start/finish lines where there is a lot of milling around, and they need to be able to cope with that and still focus on you and the job at hand. They need to enjoy going to new places without wanting to run off and explore without you! You need to let your puppy meet as many different people and other dogs as possible, and ensure the association is enjoyable. You need to take him or her out with you and experience lots of new places, and walk on lots of different surfaces, so that they will be able to cope when taken indoors on slippery surfaces, or outdoors when it is wet and muddy, or hot and the ground is hard.



Training techniques

You need to use positive training techniques as these encourage your dog to try things without worrying that they might be wrong. Punishment causes a suppression in behaviour, which is the last thing that you want with an agility dog that has to traverse a variety of equipment laid out in a variety of patterns, at speed and often at some distance from the handler. They need to be happy to 'give it a go' and perhaps get it wrong, and then recover and try again! I recommend using the clicker, with the rewards being toys and food.

It is important that your dog will work for a variety of things, and if they do not want to play with you/tug and chase things you should make the effort early on to teach this, as the ability to interact with the dog in this way is invaluable.

Agility, when to start?

Handling and basics such as waits—as soon as possible.

Jumps and weaves at 10–12 months. Beware jumping low jumps for too long! This can create the wrong jumping style in a dog that is very difficult to correct.

Contacts start with on the ground training as soon as possible including running over low ramps.

General activities

Playing and tugging are **very** important. Run with me also. A mix of control and crazy with the Ready-Go game. For agility dogs to be successful it is very important that they are able to perform certain basic behaviours well. These form the foundation of any dog sport and include stationary



behaviours and active behaviours. Attention, sit, down, recalls, run with me, figure of eight and crosses.

Targeting

Targeting is a very useful behaviour to train the dog, as it can be used in many ways, eg to teach 'come', to place the dog in different areas by where the target is. For example, facilitate send-away or go-outs, for 'contact' training, where the target is placed at the bottom of the ramp and the dog targets with its nose.

Hand targeting

To start: prepare everything: the space, the target mat, the clicker, the treats, the dog and you! Suddenly make the target mat (piece of carpet, ice cream lid etc) 'appear'. The dog will either flick its ear, move its eyes, move its head etc in the general direction of the target. **Be ready** to catch this with the clicker and reward. Hide the target and make it 'appear' again. Click as above. You should notice that the dog becomes able to:

- turn its head
- stretch its neck, move towards the mat
- jump up to the mat
- crouch down to the mat etc. as time goes on and as they become aware of what is required.

Hard presses

We are looking for the dog to really press their nose against the mat rather than just wipe the nose over it or close to it. You can click the actual touches vs the 'slidebys', and also by closing your eyes you will be able to **feel** the hard presses.



Equipment

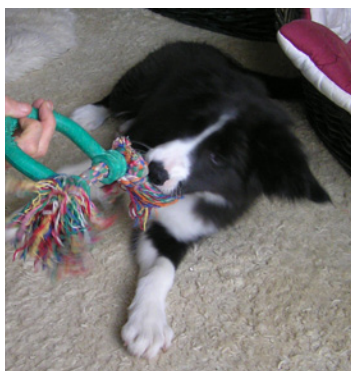
The equipment is really the easy part about teaching agility, it is what goes on between the equipment that will determine a good round or a great one.

Tunnels can be introduced early but ensure you add control over them such as waits, find the entry, left and right turns afterwards and run around and avoid doing the tunnel. You don't want a dog that dives in the tunnel at any opportunity.

Ramps can be part of the progression from targets or boxes to the real thing. A raised ramp will ensure confidence is developed in a pup not used to heights.

Weaving and Jumps can come later when the pup's muscles are well developed and progress can be made quickly.

You can start on weave lanes with a young pup which teaches fast weaving and entry from anywhere. The two-by-two method can be used on older dogs and it is possible to teach 12 poles in 12 days if you have the time and equipment!



Contact your club for details on any
Foundation classes they might offer

or

for more information go to
www.dogagility.org.nz

