



KiwiDogAgility

The Agility Dance *Use of the body and arm movements*

By Karen de Wit

Dog agility is a type of dance where the dog follows the clues given by the position and motion of the handler as well as the handler's body movement, arm motion and verbal commands. The dog and handler can be viewed as two dancers working in unison. Usually when the handler moves away the dog follows, and when the handler moves towards the dog the dog will move away.

The position of the handler gives the dog a good idea of where it needs to go next. For example, if the handler is positioned near a tunnel the dog will assume that it should negotiate the tunnel. Where there are two obstacles side by side it is a good tactic by the handler to be positioned closest to the obstacle that the dog will be required to negotiate. Some people try to "block" their dog from going to the incorrect obstacle however this usually does not work!!

In regards to body motion, when the handler is running the dog can assume that they are required to keep running or accelerating towards the obstacle in front of them. When the handler slows down or faces the dog the dog assumes that they will be required to turn around and go in a different direction. A handler may be moving at a considerable distance from the dog, but as long as the handler continues to move the dog should continue to maintain a similar pathway parallel to the handler.



These skills are especially necessary for the less mobile handlers, and are also extremely useful in some of the agility games such as Gamblers, where the handler is restricted by a line on the ground from going close to a sequence of obstacles.

How can you teach your dog the Agility Dance?

The handler leads and the dog follows.

1. The movement of the body and the direction in which the body is facing are the most important means of communication to the dog, followed by arm/hand signals. Verbal signals are equivalent to white noise and will often be ignored by the dog which understands body clues the best.
2. Initially the handler might be walking, but the exercises should eventually be done at a jog or run. The dog must have fun while doing agility and if so, is more likely to do it at speed. The handler must take care not to reprimand the dog, or the dog will become more cautious, slow down and be less likely to move away from the handler and try things!
3. There are treats in both hands, and the treat comes from the hand closest to the dog. (This hand is longer than the hand on the other side of the body, and much easier to see!) The hand is forward of the body. The use of plenty of rewards ensures that turning is a good thing for the dog.
4. Show your dog you have a treat in your hand and move away – your dog should follow and when he catches up you can click a clicker and give him the treat. Vary which hand the treat is in and ensure that this hand is the one that is held out from the body attracting the dog to it.

Turning the dog

Ideally you want your dog to turn immediately you signal a turn, without going wide and taking an extra metre and therefore taking seconds longer. In agility a fraction of a second may be the difference between a ribbon and a good time!

There are three types of turns - Front Cross, Blind cross where the handler is in front of the dog and Back cross where the handler is behind the dog. In the case of the Back cross the dog will use its peripheral vision to see the handler changing sides and respond to that by turning the same way as the handler.

Ideally you should keep an eye on your dog as much as possible, because if you lose sight of your dog you might fail to notice him going the wrong way! Turn shoulders in the direction you wish to go. The dog can read the upper body as well as the lower body.



Front crosses. (See pictures 1 to 4 attached)

Walk along with your dog at your left side. Turn towards your dog, complete a 180 degree turn and continue. Your dog should now be on your right. Repeat this on the other side.

Blind crosses

There is always an exception to any rule, and the blind cross means that you lose sight of your dog for a fraction of a second. However, the advantages of a blind cross outweigh many of the risks. Blind crosses are safest used while the dog is negotiating long obstacles such as the tunnels, the weave and contacts. They are faster to perform than a front cross, there is less impact on the human body as there is no pivoting motion, the dog is more likely to chase a person doing a blind cross as they are always facing away from the dog, whereas during a front cross the handler will at some point be pointing towards the dog and so slowing the dog down. Using the hand-chasing exercises above will help to emphasise the hand is what the dog needs to focus on.



Diane Reid turns to face her dog and the dog decelerates and starts to turn. (2009 Upper Hutt Jumpers)



Darryl Jewiss accelerates and so does Kiltie.

For up to date information on NZ Agility go to the website www.dogagility.org.nz



Consultation on the Heights review continues...

Workshops will be held around the country during September - October to discuss the various scenarios suggested in the Heights subcommittee report. The key aims of these workshops will be to:

Explain to the agility community the details around each of the scenarios that have been developed

Encourage discussion/debate/feedback on each of these scenarios.

Back cross

Starting from a sit. Step across behind your dog. His head should turn as you step behind. You can click and reward this action, with the hand nearest your dog.

Motion. Let your dog walk out ahead of you and move from his right side to his left side. The dog should change direction as you do so, creating a weaving motion as you move along. A back cross is a more subtle turning clue than a front cross.

Position of food rewards. Where distance work is the intention the rewards need to be provided at a distance from the handler. This might be a toy which is thrown, or a food reward placed inside a container of some sort. The dog runs to the container and the handler runs there too, opening the container and giving the dog a treat.



Anne Packer tells Jed where to go next.

Best Club Competition - \$500 for the winner

There are many agility clubs in NZ who are setting wonderful examples in a variety of areas such as promotion of agility to the wider community, training, equipment, running events, recruiting and helping new members and instructors and fostering a good social environment. The Agility Committee would like to acknowledge and recognise these clubs by offering a prize to the Club with the best ideas.

Write to us outlining why YOUR CLUB is the best in NZ, and send in pictures and testimonials if you think they will help. The top 3 clubs will receive a cash prize to spend how they wish.

Information will be published in subsequent Dog World and other publications.

First \$500, 2nd \$300, 3rd \$200

Applications to : Lisa Duff [acsecretary@vodafone.co.nz]
Closes: November 19th