

# DOG AGILITY

WELLINGTON GROUP



# Instructors Handbook

*Thank you for helping to assist with the training of agility at our club. We hope you will enjoy it and pass your own enjoyment and skill on to others.*

## **How to use this manual.**

### General information.

The first part comprises general information for you to pass on to your class, not necessarily the first night, and possibly not at all. For example the advice regarding the weight of the dogs might not be needed for one group, but will be for another. It is good to be tactful when speaking on such matters – telling someone their dog is fat is not going to be as well received as saying that agility dogs need to be skinny, and do they think that theirs is skinny?

### Aims for instructors.

This section gives you some ideas and hints for running a good class. What's a good class? I guess it's where the people and dogs are having fun while learning, and this includes the instructor.

### General handling and things to encourage handlers to do.

This includes some information about the safe and effective use of the clicker, food, toys and praise. It also talks about how to reduce stress and aggression problems in a class. There is an outline of the basic and obstacle commands that are used. The actual word does not matter but it is important that any verbal cues are used consistently.

### Training schedule

The training manuals are divided into weekly sets, with a total of 8 weeks for each level. Each week there is a plan for layout of equipment, aims for the session and a description of what is to be covered during that session. This may include:- a review of homework, warm-up exercises, introduction to a new obstacle, introduction to a new skill on a previously introduced obstacle, consolidation of skills to date, etc. The equipment is divided up into small sets, often with one piece of equipment per set.

## Definition of classes.

### Foundation/Puppy Class.

**Entry requirements:** This class is held for dogs that are 12- 18 months although on occasion experienced handlers with dogs younger than 12 months will be admitted.

**Aims of the class:** to introduce agility as a fun sport for puppies and owners. To teach basic control cues as they apply to agility. To teach targeting as it will apply to the contacts. To teach basic cues (if required) and obstacle cues as per Beginners with low.

### Foundation

**Entry requirements:** Over 18 months old. Usually both dogs and handlers are new to agility.

**Aims of the class:** To introduce agility as a fun sport for dogs and owners Work on learners equipment, ie. most non-contact gear, to near maximum requirements, initially on lead, however off lead when ready. Understand and able to use the clicker and rewards. Learn basic control cues as they apply to agility. Learn targeting as it will apply to the contacts. Learn obstacle cues. Learn how to read course plans and set out equipment.

### Level 1.

**Entry requirements:** Ability of dog to negotiate all individual non-contact obstacles off the lead. Dog can sit, lie down, wait, come when cued and is able to target to the ground. Dogs with recall problems will NOT be admitted to this class.

**Aims of the Class:** Off lead. Short sequences of obstacles. Back-chaining contact obstacles starting with low A-frame, dogwalk on mini tables with targeting at the end. Learning up to 6 weave poles. Distance work. To introduce directional cues, left, right, go-on. Learn how to scribe and use the timer.

### Level 2.

**Entry Requirements:** Ability to negotiate a sequence of obstacles off the lead. Ability to negotiate individual contact obstacles and target at the end..

**Aims of the class:-** To negotiate simple courses off Lead. To negotiate all full height obstacles including contact obstacles. Learn seesaw once confident on other contacts. To learn front and back crosses. Learn how to work on Scoreboard. Encourage to enter Elementary, Club Nite, Link Starters courses.

### Yellow

**Entry requirements:** Able to traverse all equipment off lead and complete simple courses. (NB. Does not apply to seesaw, may need more training).

**Aims of the class:-** introduce more complicated handling techniques such as reverse flow pivot, serpentine, pull throughs. Introduce more complex and challenging obstacle combinations, such as pull-throughs. Learn techniques for successful performance of obstacle discrimination challenges. Use seesaw in short sequences. Continue to emphasise contact points. Encourage to enter competition Starters.

### **Competitive classes**

**Entry requirements:** Able to complete a simple course utilising various handling options.

**Aims of the class:**-to complete a clear round on a Novice course and beyond. Refine skills especially on running courses, advanced skills, work on problems, course situations. To continue to have fun doing agility.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION.**

- ◆ Weight Overweight dogs – point out disadvantages to handler, allow it to only jump mini jumps. How to tell? Can you feel the ribs easily? Can you see a waist and a tucked up abdomen? Agility dogs should be on the skinny side of normal!
- ◆ Toilet Dogs must be exercised/toileted before training. \$2 fouling fine and clean up - no training until this is done
- ◆ Feeding Do not feed dogs before training, keep treats small.
- ◆ Collars and leads Should be worn unless working. No check chains at all.
- ◆ Positive training All training should be a balance of control and fun for the dog. Use food, praise, toys and Clicker training to achieve compliance by dogs.

## **TRAINING CLASS - AIMS for INSTRUCTORS.**

- ◆ Preparation Before your class read the notes for the whole course, then each week read the notes for that week. The Club has many other books or videos/dvds that can assist you.
- ◆ Punctuality Be on time yourself and ask your class to be on time too. Start the class on time and finish on time too. While a person may be later for any number of reasons do not wait for late comers, however concentrate on those who came on time and those who come regularly each week. Finish on time, even if not everyone has had the same number of goes on the last exercise (they may get more turns next week!).
- ◆ Setting up the class Class members should be given the plan and should put out the equipment. The instructor will tweak the equipment as necessary, and can show the class how to erect equipment, and where it comes from/goes away.
- ◆ Obstacles Use all the available area. Hurdles should be a minimum of 5-6 paces apart. When indoors on hard surface set hurdles bars slightly lower.

- ◆ Control exercises                      Are very important. They help warm up dog and handler (blood flow, muscles, tendons etc), they teach dog/handler the cues used, and they will help ensure both dog and handler are in a working frame of mind. They may not be “on the gear” but they are as important to successful agility as being able to jump!
  
- ◆ Class structure                              Aim for a maximum of five people to be working together at any one time. This may require splitting the class into 2 or even three groups. Smaller groups will work better because everybody is doing some activity most of the time, however there is the potential for dogs to become over-excited by other dogs running so be aware of this and make sure you structure the class to avoid crowding.
  
- ◆ Equipment                                      Nobody on equipment without an instructor present. This is a safety aspect, and to facilitate learning in a positive environment.
  
- ◆ Regular attendance                          Keep a record of attendance and mark off those present each week. At the end of term hand it in. Emphasise to handlers the need to attend regularly. If a class member misses more than one lesson follow up with a phone call, and note any problems on the attendance record.
  
- ◆ Practice    Emphasise that dogs need practice during the week to improve. Suggest 3 sessions of 5 minutes per day. Ask them to use their imagination eg. Two buckets and a broom make a jump.
  
- ◆ Interesting    Keep your class active. Idleness leads to boredom in dog and handler.
  
- ◆ Learning types                                      People learn in different ways. Some people will know what to do when they hear you tell them, others will need to see it drawn or written, some want to see it demonstrated, others will just need to try it for themselves. You should tell them what to do, demonstrate it without a dog, and you could try to demonstrate a new piece of equipment/technique with a dog in your class who has that skill, or your own dog. Don't handle other people's dogs.
  
- ◆ Aims of class    Tell handlers what they are expected to learn, give them homework, tell them about Graduation

requirements, Give them regular feedback about how they are doing and what they need to work on.

- ◆ Timeframe for class      Spend the first 5-10 minutes on control. Save the last 5 minutes for Homework and questions. That gives 30 minutes for the obstacles. Spend more time on the introduction of an obstacle. Try to divide the class up to work on an individual obstacle.
  
- ◆ Notice-board              Pass on information to your class and show them where the Notice-board is so they will keep up to date of Club happenings. If they have email the Club email list may also be useful.
  
- ◆ Videos and Books        Available free of charge to members. Are full of info re agility.
  
- ◆ Homework                  Do not be afraid to give handlers things to practice at home, and the reward will be that those who do practice will make rapid progress. However remember the old saying “practice makes permanent” so endeavour to make sure they are practicing the correct techniques!

## GENERAL HANDLING and things to encourage handlers to do.

### Clicker



The clicker is a training tool, and like all training tools will only work if used properly.

The aim of the instructor is to ensure handlers are using the clicker to mark a behaviour that will improve their agility training or their general relationship with their dog.

For many handlers the main difficulty is in the timing of the click. The other problem is how to coordinate the lead, the clicker and the food, so you need to show them how to do this, without adding too much extra to the list of things to do at the beginning. Sometimes the instructor can help by clicking for them.

Encourage handlers to purchase a bum bag, so they can put treats and plastic bags in those, and attach the clicker to it or put it in one of the pockets. This will also give them space for the target mat.

Get them to stand on the lead if the exercise permits, as that will free up a hand.

Show them how to hold the clicker and the lead in the same hand.

Remind them to swap the clicker hand too.

### Praise, Play, toys and food.

Encourage handlers to praise and play with their dogs. This will help keep them keen and excited. Most people need to be taught how to praise their dogs properly. Praise while the dog is doing well, not afterwards, watch for overuse, under-use, incorrect timing.

Tugging is good active play, however some might need to be taught "give" as well!



If handlers run back to the end of the line after completing an exercise the dog's interest in the agility will be maintained.

Use of toys and food is to be encouraged however emphasise the need to consider others. If a dog is food-focussed but not toy-focussed the handler should be encouraged to work on that, and vice versa. It is important to have as many different types of rewards as possible. Toys are great for active exercises, food is great for static exercises.

### Cues.

Encourage the use of verbal and hand signals from the beginning. Emphasise to handlers the importance of what they DO vs what they SAY – Body language is more important and gives more information to their dog than verbal cues.



The aim of Beginners class is to ensure that the handlers give consistent obstacle cues to their dogs, and that the dogs understand the basic cues ie. Sit, down, come, wait.

### Punishment.

Should not be used by handlers on the dogs, or by you on the handlers! If necessary for dogs use time out. That way all parties have the time to think about what went wrong and why it might have gone wrong. By clicking correct behaviour and by withholding the click for behaviour that is not desired the handler will be giving plenty of information to the dog.

### Reduction of stress for dogs and handlers.

The reduction of stress is important as not much learning occurs when animals are stressed. Stress can be caused by many things: a new place, new people, yelling, pulling on leads, strange smells, etc. Minimise stress as much as you can.

Suggest handlers of new dogs bring them into the building before class starts and just wander around.

Explain the importance of dog-dog space and why. Suggest handlers get between the dogs to decrease stress, and explain that distance is a de-stressor too.

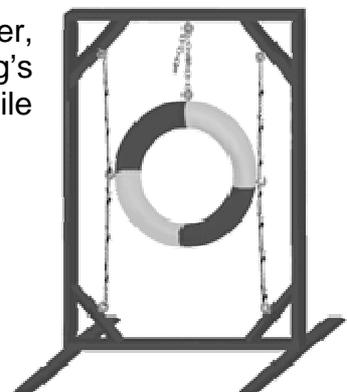
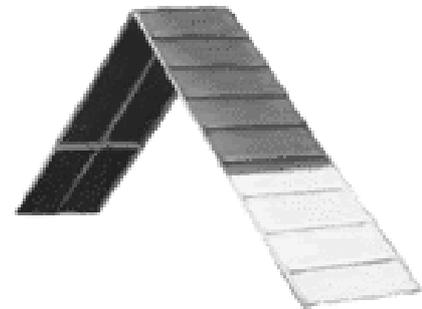
Remind handlers to keep an eye on their dog. Ensure space at start/finish of an exercise, use the areas around the ring to assemble the class rather than having all handlers and all dogs in the ring at once.

### Inter-Dog Aggression.

If a dog is consistently aggressive then the issue should be discussed with other trainers/committee because one aggressive dog can mean that the Club loses many people with friendly dogs. Ensure the stressors on the aggressive dog are minimised as much as possible. Ensure all dogs not taking part in the exercise are on a lead. As a last resort or in cases of bad aggression the handler may be asked to remove the dog from training.

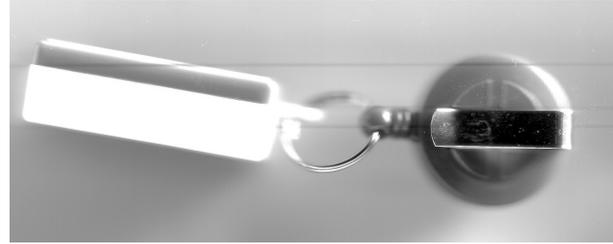
### Attention Game.

This is the best way to ensure dogs are paying attention to the handler, and to avoid inter-dog aggression. Use treats and clicker to get dog's attention on handler. Also advise handlers to ask dogs to work while waiting in line eg. sit, down, recall, tricks etc.



## USING THE CLICKER.

- The clicker is a noisemaker that is used to “mark” behaviour performed by the dog. It is paired with something the dog really likes (food, toys, games, praise, pats) which is given after the dog gets clicked (Reward after every click)



- Click DURING the desired behaviour, not after it is completed. The timing of the click is crucial. Click once (in-out.) Give the treat after that; the timing of the treat is not as important.

The sequence is:

Dog is doing something right	click	give reward
	(to mark it)	(to reinforce it)

- Click for voluntary (or accidental) movements toward your goal. (HOT/COLD Game). You may coax or lure the dog into a movement or position, but only do it 3-4 times and don't push, pull, or hold it. Work without a leash or if you need a leash for safety's sake, loop the leash over your arm or through your belt; don't use it as a tool.
- Don't wait for the "whole picture" or the perfect behaviour. Click and treat for small movements in the right direction. You want the dog to sit, and it starts to crouch in back: click. You want it to come when called, and it takes a few steps your way: click.
- Keep raising your goal. As soon as you have a good response—when the dog is voluntarily coming toward you, or weaving —start asking for more. Wait a few beats, until the dog stays down a little longer, comes a little further, weaves a little faster. Then click. This is called "shaping" a behaviour.
- When the dog has learned to do something for clicks, it will begin showing you the behaviour spontaneously, trying to get you to click. Now is the time to begin offering a cue, such as a word or a hand signal. Give the cue when you can be sure the dog will do the behaviour. Click for that behaviour if it happens during or after the cue. Start ignoring that behaviour when the cue wasn't given.

- Don't order the dog around; clicker training is not cue-based. If your dog does not respond to a cue, it is not "disobeying;" it just hasn't learned the cue completely. Find more ways to cue it and click it for the desired behaviour, in easier circumstances.
- If you get mad, put the clicker away. Don't mix scolding, leash-jerking, and correction training with clicker training; you will lose the dog's confidence in the clicker and perhaps in you.
- If you are not making progress with a particular behaviour, you are probably clicking too late. Accurate timing is important. Get someone else to watch you, and perhaps to click for you, a few times.
- Above all, have fun. Clicker-training is a wonderful way to enrich your relationship with your dog.

*(this is reprinted with permission from an article by Karen Pryor)*

## **CLICKER - THE TRANSITION FROM SINGLE OBSTACLES TO SEQUENCES.**

In Foundation class we started by using the clicker to teach an individual obstacle. When the dog is happily offering the obstacle we then add a cue (“through or tunnel command), and we then start to vary the angle of approach, we will get the handler to send the dog to the tunnel, and to recall the dog through the tunnel. All the time the dog is getting Clicked just for going through the tunnel.

When you pair obstacles up and start doing short sequences it is more likely that it is the handler that is doing the learning, not the dog. The handler is learning how to correctly cue the dog. If the dog is not being taught a specific behaviour it does not need to be clicked.

You can ask the handlers to think about what they are clicking their dogs for. For example, at the end of a run a handler may click the dog for coming to them so they can put the lead on. They may also click for a sit and a wave. But question the wisdom, and ask what is being learnt if they simply click at the end of a run if the behaviour they are clicking seems to be simply - stopping?

When you graduate to more complex things, things in which the dog faces a challenge, out comes the clicker again.

Eg. Front cross, click dog for responding to handler body language.

Eg. a tight wrap around the jump, use the clicker for the specific behaviour of turning instantly upon seeing the body cue.

So rather than running sequences, look for elements of a behaviour to click. Julie Daniels has a great way of putting it, 'spend your cookies in the middle'. She even tells students they are NOT ALLOWED to reward at the end so as to force them to click/treat something specific in the middle.

So how to get to 20 obstacles? Work larger and larger sequences.

Click/treat specific elements within the sequence, stopping to treat, pick up and go on from there. All of this builds a reinforcement history of being reinforced for doing agility and like any building process in training should be done gradually. Lots of intermittent rewards for brilliance, keep it short and simple, gradually add complexity, don't be reluctant to click/treat brilliance on the spur of the moment (forget finishing the sequence!).

This is the hardest thing to get people to do. To watch closely enough to recognize a brilliant response on the dog's part, to have the awareness to think 'I'm going to grab that!', to have the willingness to reward at that instant and let the rest of the plan go.

(from an Email by Helix Fairweather)