

Getting Started in Dog Agility



From homemade PVC jumps in the backyard to indoor, climate-controlled arenas, the dog agility bug is sweeping the country. Perhaps it has happened to you. You are flipping through the TV channels and something catches your eye. Animal Planet is showing a dog agility trial. You watch as dogs run, jump and weave through poles being directed through a complicated course by the human navigator running at their side. You poke the canine couch potato sleeping by your side and say, "Hey, do you think we could do that?"

The answer is probably yes. Almost any dog in relatively good health can perform agility at some level. All sizes, shapes and ages of people and dogs participate. Handlers range from age 9 to 90 and dogs from tiny Yorkshire Terriers to huge Great Danes. It is a great way to stimulate and exercise your dog, teaching them while they are playing. Handlers get their share of the exercise setting up jumps and trying to keep up with their dogs.

If you are interested in trying agility with your dog, there is some basic groundwork to do first. Your dog should have adequate obedience skills to be under control off leash. They should show no aggression towards other dogs or people, even in a situation with a high excitement level and much activity. It will be helpful if you know which rewards (food treats, balls, toys) motivate your dog the most. Although you can start your young pup over low jumps and introducing other obstacles, they can't compete in most venues until they are 18 months old.

Some people start with a book and a few homemade obstacles at home, but the best way to train yourself and your dog is to join a class. Learning to pay attention while working around other dogs and people is often as important to your dog as being introduced to the obstacles. Safety is an important issue and it can be very helpful to have extra people around, especially when a dog is learning a new piece of equipment. Although there are various training techniques most are based on showing the dog a piece of equipment, helping him perform the behavior you want, and then rewarding success. As the dog and handler progress, they will learn to do several obstacles in a row and eventually string together an entire course.

If this sounds like something you would like to try with your canine companion, here is a list of instructors who are also WAG members. For more information about WAG, go to our website at www.wagagility.org.

All Paws on Deck - Shelby Tilden - Corvallis. allpawsondeckagility@gmail.com

Canis agilis K9 Training - Joan Hagar & Dave Vesely - Corvallis. 541-602-6046, www.canisagilis.com, davidvesely321@gmail.com

EK9 Agility - Barbara Standiford - Salem (3 miles from Exit 263 on I-5). www.EK9Agility.com, Barbara@EK9Agility.com

For the Love of Dog - Sharon Gakstatter - Adair Village-Corvallis. Text 541-250-7320, www.fortheloveofdogs.pet, sharon@fortheloveofdogs.pet

If you struggle with any aspect of agility, whether it's performance in the ring or behavior outside of the ring, you and your dog may benefit from evaluation and/or training to optimize performance. Here's the contact information for a WAG member who is a veterinarian and behaviorist:

Paige Pierce, MS, DVM – Portland. www.animalbehaviorclinic.net, drpierce@animalbehaviorclinic.net

WAG Membership Chair
Anne Minnich, annellama@gmail.com