

## MOVING CONTROL

**Your dog should be proficient at stationary exercises before introducing moving control exercises, which are much more challenging.**

**Controlled walking:** Do not start this exercise until your dog is proficient at coming in to both sides. In controlled walking your dog should walk next to you on the desired side and at the same speed that you are moving. Your dog should speed up and slow down with you. Be sure that your dog stays parallel to you and does not race ahead. Start controlled walking with just a step or two, marking and treating your dog for moving with you. As your dog becomes successful, increase the number of steps you take before reinforcing. Once your dog can move with you at a normal pace, then you can add slow and fast changes of pace. If you have a dog that consistently wants to move ahead of you, it is a good idea to mark and then toss the reinforcer behind the dog to keep him from focusing forward as much. If you have a Velcro dog (a dog that wants to stay glued to your side and not move ahead), it is a good idea to mark and then toss the reinforcer ahead of the dog to encourage him to move forward confidently.

**Let's go:** Once you have mastered controlled walking, you can take this exercise to the next level by adding running to it. Use an exciting verbal prompt as you encourage your dog to run along with you. Keep connected to your dog by using praise. Your dog does not need to maintain strict eye contact but must be responsive to you. Run and then slow down in short, intense spurts. You want your dog to run parallel to you at approximately the same speed. If your dog tends to forge ahead of you, turn away from him and run in the opposite direction, encouraging him to catch up. Be sure to reinforce your dog for catching you. Practice this exercise with your dog on both your left and right sides.

### CROSSES

The purpose of a cross is to change the side of your body that your dog is working on. The types of turns and crosses you may use on an agility course depend on the nature of the course, your dog, and your physical abilities. Most people find it useful to be able to perform at least some of these maneuvers. We will give a brief general description of each move, but it is best to get in-person instruction from a knowledgeable agility trainer.



*Front cross: handler crosses in front of dog*



*Rear cross: handler crosses behind dog*



*Blind cross: handler crosses in front of dog*

**Front cross:** You will use the front cross as a way to switch sides when you are ahead of your dog. You will turn toward your dog, cueing your dog to turn toward you so he ends up on the opposite side of your body.

**Rear cross:** You will use the rear cross as a way to switch sides when you are behind your dog. As the dog moves ahead, you will cross behind, which will cue your dog to turn in the new direction, and continue with your dog on the opposite side.

**Blind cross:** As with the front cross, the blind cross is used to switch sides when you are ahead of your dog. Instead of turning into your dog, you will continue moving forward ahead of your dog and cross his path, so he ends up on your opposite side. We don't use blind crosses often, if ever, because it entails losing visual communication with our dog.

## **AGILITY HEELING**

Once you have mastered the basic moving control exercises, you can put them all together to practice agility heeling. Agility heeling gives you the opportunity to perform all the basic agility moves without equipment. It is also an excellent way to improve your teamwork and your dog's responsiveness to your cues. We recommend that you use a combination of verbal cues, body language, and hand signals during agility heeling. Start out slowly at first and only try one or two moves at a time. It will take you a while to feel comfortable going through the agility moves at a normal and at a fast pace with your dog. If you feel unsure about performing this exercise, check with your agility instructor for feedback and suggestions.

Agility heeling can include controlled walking, *Let's go*, and front and rear crosses. Be surprising and exciting during this exercise. Keep each sequence of agility heeling relatively short (no more than 1 to 2 minutes) and reinforce your dog multiple times during each sequence. You can mark and treat for attention, a quick response, a nice cross, and so on, then simply continue with the sequence. Release your dog for a minute or so between each sequence and allow him to relax. Remember to practice all your moving exercises with your dog on both your left and right sides.

Some examples of agility heeling would be:

- Start with a quick *Let's go*, take a few steps, do a front cross, slow down into controlled walking for a few steps, and then do a blind cross.
- Start with slow controlled walking, suddenly increase to a fast pace, do a rear cross, change back to a slow pace, do a front cross, increase to a moderate pace for a few steps, and do a blind cross.
- From a stationary position do a front cross, then move into a fast pace for a few steps, go into a slow pace, then do a blind cross.

Try lots of combinations and variations. You are only limited by your imagination.

As we mentioned before, it is *extremely* important to reinforce your dog multiple times during the agility heeling sequences. The purpose of this exercise is to practice and perfect the small movements that lead to success in the agility ring. To get this kind of responsiveness and precision, you need to capture those moments and reinforce them.

In example #1 above, there are many opportunities to reinforce specific behaviors. You could mark and treat when your dog moves into a fast pace with you, mark and treat again after the front cross, mark and treat again when your dog slows into controlled walking.

## **ADVANCED AGILITY HEELING**

Once your dog can successfully perform agility heeling then you can add some advanced variations to increase the difficulty. Some examples would include:

**Treat toss:** When you are giving your dog his treat for a good performance in advanced agility heeling, toss the treat behind him for him to turn and chase. When he gets to his treat, you will start moving forward. Your dog should soon realize that you are heeling without him and catch up with you. You can call his name and encourage him to come toward you. Be sure to mark and reward when he reaches your side. If your dog runs past you rather than moving to your side, turn quickly and move in the opposite direction. His job is to find his position at your side. If your dog does not try to move toward you, move faster so that you are more exciting and interesting.

**Run away:** In this variation of the treat toss, you toss your dog's treat behind him, then run away from him. This should encourage your dog to quickly get his treat then race to catch up with you. Don't slow down and wait for your dog; keep moving quickly until your dog gets to you. Mark and reward when he reaches your side.

**Silent agility heeling:** To help your dog focus on your body language and movement rather than your voice, you can practice agility heeling without any verbal cues or prompts. Your dog's job is to pay close attention to you to catch your movements and signals. Be sure to reinforce often when beginning this exercise to let your dog know that he is doing the right thing.

**Stays:** To increase your control over your dog's movement, you can add sit-, down-, and stand-stays to your agility heeling exercises. When your dog is moving well at your side stop and ask him to sit. Tell him to stay, and then walk away. Mark and toss him his treat. When you can walk away easily, you can move further away before you reward. When he can manage the further distance easily, you can move away at a faster pace. Later you might circle him at a walk before rewarding. About three-quarters of the time, reward him while he's in the stay. About one-quarter of the time, call him from the stay to your side. For the down-stay you may need to pivot in front of your dog to stop his forward motion, then ask for a down. The stand-stay is often the most difficult position for dogs to hold. Don't try to move away too far or too quickly. Reinforce while your dog is being successful and you are still close. Follow the same guidelines for the stand- and down-stays of rewarding the dog in the stay three-quarters of the time and calling him to your side one-quarter of the time.

## **CIRCLE WORK**

Run in circles with dog on your right, both clockwise and counterclockwise. Do the same with the dog on your left. When you and your dog are doing this well, add figure eights.

Start with running in a small circle and then increase in size with the dog first on the outside. Stop often and play tug. To run with the dog inside the circle, place the dog on a leash. The hand farthest from the dog holds the end of the lead and the hand close to the dog holds the lead near the dog to control his body position. Start slow and increase speed.

After you are successful at this, change venues and run in different environments.

Run in a small circle and then stop and do a 360° spin with your dog staying on the same side. This is a great exercise for leading up to doing jump pinwheels.

## **Front Cross**

Run in a straight line and then turn in the opposite direction. Have the dog turn in towards you as he switches direction. What you are accomplishing is starting with the dog on one side of you and effectively switching the dog to the other side. Practice doing a turn and then throwing a toy to encourage speed and acceleration. Then increase the number of turns before throwing the toy. Add this maneuver to your circle work.

For more great information, check out *IN FOCUS* (2004) by Deborah Jones, Ph.D. & Judy Keller