

Agility Training Tips

- ◆ You most effectively communicate what it is you want your dog to do by moving in the direction of the obstacle, supported by a hand signal. Your dog keys more on visual clues than on verbal, especially in the beginning. Concentrate on giving your dog a strong hand signal, and lining up your body to face the obstacle to be performed. Be sure to give your hand signal with the hand closest to the dog.
- ◆ If it is at all possible, do not speak the name of the obstacle until your dog is pointed towards, and focused on that obstacle. Your dog will tend to move in the direction that his nose is pointed. Your task will be to make your dog's nose point where it is that you want him to go.
- ◆ In agility, unlike some other dog sports, there's no penalty for giving a command more than once.
- ◆ Reduce the "noise" your dog must listen to when performing. For example, you don't need to use your dog's name before every command. In general, it is not necessary to blather at your dog. Keep your working conversation to a minimum, saying just enough to motivate and direct your dog.
- ◆ Consistency in what you do is key to a successful working relationship with your dog.
- ◆ It is better to be upbeat and enthusiastic with your dog than not. Your dog will be sensitive to you getting angry or flustered or frustrated during a training session. It is your job to keep the dog happy. When your dog piles into the car to go to agility class, you want to seem him excited and enthusiastic and knowing that he's getting ready to have the most fun in the whole world-and there should be no one in the world he'd rather do it with than you!
- ◆ When training for agility, you need to learn to be a bit silly with your dog. Your voice must be a sublimely happy voice. You need to whoop and holler and cavort. When your dog does anything right-*anything*--reward the performance with joyful celebration. If your dog does something wrong, all it really means is that the dog didn't get it. So you don't do anything-you don't chastise and you don't bark.
- ◆ What you do at home each week is as important or more important than what you do in class each week. You should use opportunities at home to teach your dog obedience, to socialize your dog, and to train on agility obstacles. This means that much to the delight of your neighbors, you will most likely at some time have agility obstacles and toys in your yard-much like those neighbors will have swing sets and other toys for their children.