

PAWSITIVE STEPS CANINE SPORTS

GUIDELINES FOR PUPPIES IN AGILITY TRAINING

Pawsitive Steps loves having puppies in our agility program! The sooner we can start our foundation training the better! HOWEVER...too often over eager puppy owners try to do too much too soon. We are now finding out in our sport that there is a LOT of chronic injury happening early on that does not show up as a problem until the dog is around 2 years old. These are soft tissue repetitive injuries that the dogs are sustaining and they are STARTING to develop as puppies! Therefore we wanted to take the time to set out some guidelines for our students who are training puppies for agility.

We have gone to great lengths to make sure we have puppy safe equipment for our classes and we have created lots of fun concept games and foundation games that require NO stress on the puppies body but WILL translate later to “real” agility and will make the transition into the sport seamless.

We do NOT use the full agility equipment. It is modified or different objects used to build strength and confidence in our puppies while building solid foundation skills for later training. This would include, wobble boards, jump bumps, helper wings, cones, balance discs, 2x2 poles, short tunnels, travel planks, etc.

Most puppy classes are held in the evenings and we advise the handlers that it would be wise for puppies to have rested prior to coming to a puppy class.

Basic Obedience Skills are a MUST!

Puppies should be well socialized with people and other puppies along with their owners, instructors and observers. Some basic obedience skills are highly recommended for the puppy before starting puppy Agility training including;

- Name recognition
- Sits/Downs
- Walking on lead in a nice manner on both sides
- Collar Grabs
- Recalls with mild distractions
- Tugging/Retrieve
- Be quiet in a crate
- Can hold a sit stay

It is recommend that a veterinarian check the puppy before starting puppy Agility training.

Training a puppy should be FUN, with plenty of positive interaction between puppy and handler. It has to be mentally stimulating and not too physically taxing. And remember the majority of puppies are fearless, they will try most things, keep this confidence up, but be aware they will also try things that are not in their best interest! It is the responsibility of the owner to learn what is appropriate for young bodies and what is NOT. Always check with your trainer before doing anything agility related. Just because they WILL, does not mean they SHOULD!!!!

When training a puppy on Agility equipment, there MUST be NO impact on its body whatsoever, growing joints are easily damaged. Many years will go into training to become an Agility dog, do not abuse your puppy physically or mentally. Training should not include jumping full height until the minimum age of 12 months and longer for the larger breeds in consultation with their vet.

When puppies become adult dogs (over 2 years of age), it is advisable to take them to a veterinarian for a physical checkup i.e. hips, elbows, patella's and eyes.

Training the Agility Puppy

When training puppies, it is very important that you remember a few things.

- **It must be FUN at all times. Use lots of toys, food and praise.**
- Always work puppies on both sides of the handler.
- Always keep training sessions short. We use the guideline of 10 cookies or 2 min, whichever comes first, and then a rest. Some people need to set a timer to be able to stick to this!

Our Family Manners classes and Building Blocks classes will address these skills and more.

TRAINING WITH EQUIPMENT

PIPE TUNNEL RULES

A puppy of any age can learn how to go through a piped tunnel, HOWEVER, this is a highly reinforcing behaviour for some puppies and you can create “tunnel mania” if you are not careful! Always balance out tunnel work with playing and heeling the puppy past and around the tunnels.

Puppies 4-7 months

Use the shortest tunnel you can get at first and make sure it is bagged with tunnel bags always. Only straight lines through the tunnel. No tight turns!

Puppies 7-10 months

You can gradually increase the length of the tunnel but never overpower the puppy with the length of it. When the puppy has gained confidence you can introduce a slight curve a little bit at a time with soft turns out.

Puppies 11 Months and up - You can start working tighter turns out of the tunnels.

CONTACT EQUIPMENT - DOGWALK, AFRAME, TEETER RULES

Puppies 4-12 months - absolutely NO FULL CONTACT EQUIPMENT!

Contact foundation training can start with travel planks on the ground. ONLY.

Wobble boards ok as long as the puppy is never forced to stay on a wobble board.

Balance discs for a MAX of 15 second at a time.

Follow the instructions of your trainer about the progressions for contact training. If you are unsure always check with your instructor.

WEAVE POLE RULES

Puppies 4 -14 months - ABSOLUTELY NO WEAVE POLE TRAINING UNTIL PUPPIES ARE 14 months old! This includes 2x2's and channel poles where the dog is bending its body at all.

JUMPING RULES

Puppies 4-7 months - JUMP BUMPS ONLY. No ballistic turning and not bars on the jumps.

Puppies 7-9 Months - no jumping higher than 2” over wrist height.

Puppies 10-12 months - no higher than elbow height.

Puppies 12 months and up with vet/trainer clearance can work up to full height in controlled jump grids ONLY. NO SEQUENCING!

HANDLING/SEQUENCING

We do NOT sequence puppies on low jumps. Sequencing course work does not begin until the puppy is well over 12 months old and is fully capable of jumping full height or close to full height. Then each handling cue will be taught first on one jump or through our jump grids and then added into short sequences.