

ABOUT AGILITY

What is Agility?

Agility is a competitive sport that involves directing a dog over, under and through a course of obstacles such as jumps, tunnels, bridges and platforms, using voice commands and/or hand signals. In competition, dogs are scored for accuracy and speed.

Is Agility for Your Dog?

Dog agility can be a sport for a lifetime. It is appropriate for all reasonably able-bodied dogs regardless of age, size, or breed/mix.

Puppies can begin informal training as early as four months of age. They cannot compete before they are at least 12 months old, because performing the equipment (particularly jumping) at full height could cause permanent damage to their growth plates. They can, however, begin to develop coordination, focus, and concentration by learning how to execute the obstacles at low heights, as well as learning the fundamentals of jumping without actually jumping jumps!

Senior dogs can enjoy agility, too. However, they should jump below standard heights to prevent damage to their joints and spine. Seniors may also compete in fun matches for exhibition purposes only. Most agility venues offer the opportunity for dogs of any age to jump one height lower than would normally be required, at the handler's discretion. The challenges remain the same, but the heights are lower.

Exposure to a pleasurable activity in the company of other dogs seems to help resolve temperament problems such as excessive shyness or fearful behavior, as well as some aggressive behavior. Dogs who have these types of temperament problems may participate in WCAC classes. However, handlers are expected to be in full control of dogs who are aggressive toward other dogs or people, and participation is subject to approval on a per dog basis.

If your dog has a temperament issue, please discuss it with one of our trainers before you join a class. Chances are you will be accepted, however, we want to know about potential problems in advance.

Getting Started in Agility – The Beginner Class

In Beginner agility class, working mostly on-leash, dogs learn to safely and accurately perform the obstacles – climb over the A-frame and dog walk, jump over various hurdles, go through open and collapsed tunnels, weave through a series of evenly spaced poles, sit or down (and stay) on raised platforms, and negotiate the teeter board. They learn the names of the obstacles as well as directional commands such as right, left, switch sides and turn, so that eventually you can direct them using primarily your voice and hand/body signals. Beginner class offers opportunities to reinforce both formal and informal obedience commands that your dog may already know such as: sit, come, down, heel, wait, easy, let's go, etc.

Because a primary goal in agility is for both you and your dog to have fun, be prepared to give your dog lots of verbal encouragement, praise, affection, pats, hugs, kisses and treats as both of you learn.

Even very talented dogs may attend several Beginner and/or Intermediate classes before they are considered ready to move up to the next level of instruction.

Now That You're Hooked – The Intermediate Class

Dogs who have mastered the obstacles and can do some work off-lead are ready to progress to the Intermediate class. Here, dog and handler continue to refine their performance- building teamwork, accuracy and speed. Because the combination of obstacles and the course layouts change weekly, you and your dog will face new challenges in every class. Each week will offer opportunities to experiment with different strategies. One thing agility cannot become is routine!

Time To Get Serious – The Advanced Class

Advanced class is for dog/handler teams who are finished performers preparing for competition. Some dogs never reach this level, but there's absolutely no pressure to do so. If competition doesn't appeal to you, you and your dog can still return year after year... just for fun!

Competitive Agility

Several national organizations in the United States sponsor competition in the sport of agility. The two oldest are the United States Dog Agility Association (USDAA), and the United Kennel Club (UKC) agility program- which was formerly known as the Trans-National Club for Dog Agility (NCDA). Other organizations include the North American Dog Agility Council (NADAC), American Kennel Club (AKC), Canine Performance Events (CPE), Teacup Dog Agility Association (TDAA) and Just For Fun League (JFF). TDAA is open to dogs measuring less than 16" at the shoulders. All other venues are open to all dogs, regardless of pedigree, mix or size. The skills needed to compete in agility trials are basically the same for all organizations. Rules differ, requiring a greater or lesser degree of precision and speed in execution of the obstacles.

Generally speaking, agility trials allow for a more relaxed atmosphere and freedom of expression for both handler and dog than do obedience trials.

Many different types of contests and performance levels are offered by each agility organization. You and your dog may compete for an almost endless number and variety of titles, in any or all venues. 11/2015