DOG AGILITY AS A SPORT – WHAT IS IT?

- **Agility is a race over an obstacle course.** The obstacles must be completed in a specific order. During a competition, sport timers are used to determine how fast the dog did the course.
- **The person directs the dog where to go.** Cues are mostly body language with some verbal cues.
- **The goal of agility is to complete the course accurately in the fastest time possible.** If you enter a competition, your time will be recorded, and any faults (mistakes) will be noted down to determine your place in the class.
- **In a competition, every course is different.** The judge designs the courses. The person walks the course and memorizes it before running it with the dog.
- **There are different classes that test different skills.** There are beginning, intermediate, advanced, and tournament level classes.
- **The height your dog jumps is determined by how tall he/she is at the shoulder.** Small dogs compete against small dogs. Tall dogs compete against tall dogs.

AGILITY JUST FOR FUN

You don't have to compete! If you decide you don't want to compete, training will go more quickly. You will only have to train the dog to do the equipment safely. You won't have to worry about as many details. There are trainers in Tucson who offer classes for people who do not plan on competing!

OBSTACLES

- Obstacles include jumps, weave poles, teeter totter, A-frame, dog walk (Long narrow board with ramps leading up and down from it), table, tunnels, broad jump, tire. There are rules about how the obstacles are constructed and of what materials.
- Obstacles must be completed in a specific way. For example, when doing the obstacles with ramps, there are "contact zones" on the bottoms of the ramp which are painted a different color. The dog must touch the contact zone with at least one paw, they can't jump over it. Another example is the weave poles. The dog must always enter the weave poles with the first pole on the left.

TRAINING – HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

- It takes months to be able to safely do all the obstacles. It will likely take at least a year or more to be ready to compete. This depends on your dog and experience training.
- In order to be successful, training is very methodical.
- Foundation training may not even include agility equipment! Your dog might learn to run around a cone first so it learns to work away from you. Your dog may learn to stop on a mat with his rear paws. This will help him later with the dog walk.

USEFUL SKILLS TO HAVE BEFORE DOING AGILITY

- A stay
- A recall
- Able to be in a crate (In a group class, your dog may need to be contained while other dogs work. At a trial, you will need to be able to crate your dog.)
- Any tricks! Good for building a working relationship with your dog.

VIDEOS

*(*note. These videos show people running, but you don't have to run. You can train a dog to work farther away from you, so you can move more slowly.)*

1. Foundation Exercises
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KzF8xVGdY1I

note: This video is intended to be an example of some ways to do foundation training and show how agility skills are built incrementally. Not everybody teaches all these tricks or exactly in this way! Amber Abbott is a trainer from Peoria, AZ.

2. Beginner agility
An example of a beginner team at a trial. (Trials can be distracting, and things don't always go smoothly!)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zutSlrzv5lE

3. Advanced agility

An example of an advanced team.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z0XK77LPGvU

4. Little dogs doing agility!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ve2lEyR_fXg

5. Distance Handling
(NADAC agility focuses on simple courses and the dog works far away from the person. This video is elite level. There are also beginning levels, and you don't have to compete at this level!)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gw0x5OG0cK0

5. Elite agility in Europe
Agility in Europe is known for being very competitive.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=og4JGkTFqeM&t=183s

WHAT WILL AGILITY BE FOR YOU?

Agility can be different things to different people. It can be a very competitive sport and you can invest lots of time and money in competitions. It can be a casual game you play with your dog, and you might only compete a couple times a year locally. Or, maybe you just take some classes for fun and don't compete. However, it always requires patience and a positive attitude to keep it fun. A legitimate trainer will never have you scold your dog when playing agility or use aversive training techniques.

WHY WE DON'T SAY "NO" WHILE TRAINING.

During training we do not tell the dog "no" or scold them. Why?

- **We are usually the reason for the mistake!** Often we think we gave a clear cue, when we actually made a mistake. Maybe we gave the command too late, or we were pointing in the wrong direction. It is better to error on the side of caution and assume you messed up, not your dog.

- **You will slow your dog down!** If you tell your dog she is making mistakes, she will eventually become insecure and go slower in an effort to not make mistakes. Agility is a race. So, we don't want them to go slow!
- **It is our job to make sure the dog is right!** Agility training is done in small steps, so that the dog can usually get it right. We don't want to challenge them too quickly. If our dog keeps making a mistake it means we need to backtrack and make the exercise easier.