

Dog Foundations

By Christy Gammage,
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What will your agility training journey look like? It should start with a good foundation, for both you and your dog.

The dog's foundation work includes basics like sit, stay, come, and other "good citizen" behaviors like walking around a busy area

with people and other dogs, resting in a crate, riding in a car, being comfortable in new places.

For agility-related skills dogs should be happy walking on uneven or wobbly surfaces and knowing

where their feet are (both front and back). Learning to navigate stairs, hiking over rough terrain, walking over bars on the ground or even through a ladder laying on the ground builds an awareness of paw placement. Working on soft surfaces like sofa cushions or inflatable fitness equipment builds balance and core strength.

The dog should be able to work on both sides of you, turning left and right on cue, circling a tall cone/pole/tree/etc both left



and right. Flexibility is one goal, but you need the ability to direct your dog to an obstacle from whichever side you are on and tell them which way to turn for the next obstacle.

Being able to send your dog to a mat or other designated place is useful. In addition to having somewhere for your dog to hang out while you reset equipment, you can use this to train stays, recalls and sends over obstacles.

Your dog's desire to play with you is very important in agility, so playing tug and having the dog chase you for a toy or food are great things to practice (tough job, huh). Swapping between different toys and food in a play session will help you understand what your dog finds rewarding. Knowing what motivates your dog will be crucial in their training.

Humans need foundation work too. While being agile yourself is helpful, there are more important things. We will discuss that in next month's article.

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