

Go On, Do Agility

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Practice Makes Pawfect

In dog agility, sending your dog out to an obstacle is as important as calling them back from the obstacle. There are "forward sends" where you want the dog to move ahead of you and "lateral sends" where the dog moves out away from your side. While some dogs will happily run

away from you (in which case work on the come/recall articles first), sending the dog away from you can be a difficult task for many dogs. These 'velcro' dogs would much rather stay right beside you and have you run essentially the same course they are running. But dogs are usually faster than the handler and since agility is a speed sport, you want the dog to go as fast as they can without you. Sending your dog to take the obstacle in the corner while you cut across to meet them at a later obstacle is a good way to keep up or get ahead of them.

Today let's take a look at the forward send. Commonly called a "Go On" cue, you start by teaching the dog to run to a reward on the ground. That reward can be a toy or a treat. If using food, a 'target plate' such as the lid of a plastic container (large yogurt lids work well) will make the target obvious and keep the food from getting lost in the grass or scattered on the floor. While holding the dog back, place the toy/treat on the ground, walk 5-10 feet away, and turn to face the reward. When the dog is looking at



the reward, release them with an excited "Get It". The goal is that the dog happily bounds to the reward. If the dog isn't too interested then use a better reward, don't go as far away and increase the excitement in your voice with a "Reeaadddyyy, GET IT!". Follow the dog to the reward location. Play with him and the toy briefly or put another treat on the target plate for them to eat. Having good things happen when you catch up will help get them focused for another round. Practice a couple of times while varying the distance and the location from which you are coming or sending.

Once the dog is happily running to the reward from a distance you can add a very low jump. Place the reward 5-10' away from the jump (depending on dog size). Basically, enough distance for them to land comfortably and take one stride. Bring the dog to the other side of the jump, line them up 2-5' away facing the jump where they can see the target between the uprights. When the dog is looking at the reward, release them with a "Get It". The jump

should be so low that it is easier to go over it than go around. If the dog still goes around the jump to grab the reward you can set them up closer to the jump, lower the jump more or enlist a helper to put the reward out only if the dog goes over the jump. When the dog is excitedly going over one low jump, you can add a second one in line 10-15' before the existing jump. Setup and release the dog in front of the new jump so that they can still see the reward between the uprights of both jumps. After they take the first jump, add your "Go On" cue. It means nothing to the dog initially, but will become the 'take what is in front of you' command. In future sessions, add a third jump in the lineup.

Now is the time to start fading the prop of the toy or target plate. We want the dog to take the jump(s) even if they can't see the reward. If using a toy, practice being able to throw it to a specific location like a hula hoop, first from a standstill and then while running toward and past it. Start with one jump again, and throw the toy to the same reward location only after releasing the

releasing them or run after the dog before throwing the toy. With multiple jumps, enlist your helper to toss the toy.

If using food on a target plate, start shrinking the size of the target plate and/or use a transparent lid (think Pringles lid). Alternatively, a helper can drop/toss the food to the reward location as the dog is jumping the last jump. Food-holding toys such as a Lotus Ball or Treat Hugger can also be thrown to the reward location.

Critical for this "Go On" training is that the reward is not coming from your hand directly to the dog's mouth. The dog must be getting the reward away from you because that is where you want to encourage the dog to go. Eventually we may have the dog run to the reward location and get a delayed reward (food or toy play) when we get there. Once the "Go On" cue is trained to fluency, the final reward for the dog will be to continue to play with you on the course. So Go On, have some fun with your practice!

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