

Bringing Agility Inside

By Christy Gammage

Practice Makes Pawfect

Boy, the weather out there looks bad. Guess I can't work on my dog agility. What? I can improve my agility skills without going outside? How?

A great way would be to rent an indoor facility that has the space, equipment and flooring to do agility. However, these places are few and far between and may be out of budget even when available. So, let's look at what you can do in your own house.

While having a dedicated space (garage, basement) with special flooring (for cushioning and traction) is ideal, a hallway or your living room can also make a good training space. Footing is still crucial when trying anything with jumping or speed, so avoid hard surfaces (tile, wood, etc). Use area rugs, yoga mats or even bath mats if those are your only choices.

We can start with general conditioning and proprioception (knowing where their body parts are) exercises. Cavalletti can be setup in a hallway. Clicker training the dog to put all 4 feet in an adequately sized box, walk backwards to a bath mat or walk along a slightly raised board are great practice for helping the dog 'find' their feet. Having the dog stand square while you gently push on a shoulder or hip activates muscles that help stabilize the body. Gently lifting and holding each foot while asking the dog to stand on the other 3 for a few seconds is also good for building up stability.



Standing and moving on unstable surfaces like a wobble board or tippy board are good practice for a teeter. A couch cushion or two can likewise function as an unstable surface.

Start line stays and recalls are easily worked in the house. Having the dog sit/stay before being released to go through major doorways or to eat the dinner you just put down is great impulse-control practice for the dog. Playtime can include having the dog sit/stay while you hide in another room. Call them then have a party with treats or toy play when they find you.

Now is also a great time to teach or practice the game of tug. Everyone likes games where they win, so let the dog "win" the toy. Having a second toy (that you



make seem extra fun) will bring them back to re-engage with you again. Keep swapping toys so they are always winning and you are always fun to come back and play with.

Working on your Pause Table performance is easy with a dog-specific platform like a Klimb or Cato. But you can also use a bath mat as the station for your dog to stay on, be called from and sent back to.

While very small dogs can probably do some jump work on soft carpeted surfaces, all sized dogs can work on wrapping around a jump wing you've brought in. No wings? A chair or large box can also be used to send the dog around. Maybe now is the time to teach a cue

for the dog to take the jump from the backside (bar on the ground, of course).

Want to practice weave poles? Toilet plungers (borrowed from neighbors) lined up in the hall could work if you don't have a weave set you can bring in the house.

A 2-on-2-off contact performance can be practiced on a 'travel plank' which is a stable, slightly raised board with traction. Start on level ground to teach and reward the position. Later stairs can be used to simulate the angle on the dog walk or A-Frame. When successful around the house, you can take it outside.

Still bored and stuck inside? Teach tricks. Anything that lets you work with your dog in a positive and rewarding way can only help your relationship out on the agility field and beyond.

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