

Puppy Agility

For All Venues

(For Conformation People, Too!!)



Written by Tracy Hendrickson - Sunchase Boxers.

Tracy is a nationally ranked Boxer obedience competitor and has earned over 200 performance titles with her Boxers. She has taught agility and obedience at her local clubs for over 20 years. She can be reached at Brindoll@cox.net.

Dog agility is one of today's most popular sports. Foundation training is essential to any dog sport – whether he will be doing conformation, obedience or agility. Most Boxers can be trained and can take part in agility competition, but it is easier when you can start with a puppy. Start from day one. (See Tracy's article from Boxer Ring Spring 2005 – "Super Socializing Your Next Litter," also available on her website at www.SunchaseBoxers.com.) Starting your Boxer

puppy early DOES make a difference with them gaining confidence, no matter what ring they compete in!!!

If you make the effort to lay down the foundation work, your Boxer puppy in the future, will work at a higher level much faster and have the enthusiasm and desire to work. Early puppy training is much easier vs. training adolescents or adults. Most puppies are FEARLESS, curious and want to try new things. We need to use this to our advantage.

Early puppy training will let you gain control by



the time the puppy is one year old and harder physical training can come easily after. Training at a young age is taught as a game. You want to make it a positive and safe experience to help with his coordination and confidence in the future.

"Sit," "stay" and "come" (and "stand" for conformation) commands need to be foundation behaviors. They can be taught at an early age

without robbing the babe of his puppy-hood. You can teach your puppy that you are his best playmate—making life fun with toys, treats and most importantly yourself. Keep sessions short and fun. Always leave him wanting more.

Puppy agility games help teach "body awareness," since they grow so fast and their coordination is always in question. Use no force and train him to do as you ask. By 12 months old you will have loaded the foundation work for formal training still to come.

Enhancing the bond at an early age will let you reap the rewards with a very self-confident puppy. Formal training in the future will come so much easier since you have set a foundation that will last a lifetime.

Use motivators such as toys, treats and praise. Make yourself more interesting than other distractions. I have always said, "The death of a performance dog is boredom."

Train your puppy as informally as possible before six months. Try to enroll in a local puppy kindergarten class. Most will have some type of puppy agility equipment to get started on.

Always start with your puppy on a buckle collar and on a light leash that they can drag. Starting at 8 weeks is best. Keep him socialized with a lot of people, with different noises at your home, even before they are fully vaccinated. You get out what you put in early in their life!!!

Agility is not all about jumping. There are many obstacles that can be taught that do not put a strain on growing puppy frames. Due to the nature of the sport, formal training can put too much strain on growing bones and joints on babes less than 12 months old.



Super Simple Puppy Agility Equipment and Training

- Obtain a 1 inch X 6 inch X 12 foot plank and place it over a brick (4 inches off the ground) and work it as a baby teeter totter. This gets the puppy used to something moving under their feet...or

- Obtain a 3 ft. X 3 ft. board with a tennis ball underneath. As with the teeter, keep your puppy on leash, and gently guide him to the treats that you have placed along the board. Always praise him each time he progresses to the next treat. Add a “wait” command when he reaches the end of the plank and keep him from leaping off. Release him with an “OK” and reward.

- Tunnels can be found by using large cardboard boxes opened at each end. Place a treat at the exit, let him see it, and release him from the other end to go through the tunnel. Progress by sending him through on his own while meeting him at the other end and with a treat in you hand. Never jump your puppy

higher than his “elbow” height.

- Puppy hurdles can be used with a 6-inch PVC pipe.

- On leash, run him over it using an “over” command. Gradually raise the PVC pipe with bricks, as your puppy gets older. Knocking the bar over is usually a

correction in itself to the puppy and he will learn to pick up his feet.

- Use a large towel or sheet to place over the puppy for finding a way out. A little bit of stress and success is a good thing at this stage in their life.

- Find a friend or training partner for puppy recalls. Use them to restrain your puppy and release him to you with a “come” command. Praise, treat and play when he reaches you. This can also be done through tunnels and over jumps.

- Use a small visible paper plate or his food bowl with a treat on top as a target for “send aways” to a table (small weight bearing low set box). Show him the treat, restrain him until he is focused, and release him with a simultaneous command “go table!!!” Slowing increase the distance. Also, send him laterally away from you to the target using a “get out” command. This exercise teaches him to work away from you with confidence.

- Put names to obstacles—-they can learn these at any age.

“Train you dog every day as if it is the last day you will ever spend with him .”

Easy Training Tips

- Never over work your puppy. Multiple short sessions (10-15 minutes max.) a couple times a day keeps him from being bored and you will leave him wanting more. Use training for their meals as treats. He will be more eager to learn and develop a food drive.

- Always praise your puppy for a job well done. A happy puppy will be more willing to learn vs. a puppy that isn’t having a good time.

- Get your puppy excited and run with him on both the left and right sides. Add turns, stops and comes. Reward, praise and play. This exercise is important to make your puppy aware of your body position and where he needs to be.

- Never physically force or punish your puppy. Cruelty or rough handling will not teach anything but fear.



- Keep your commands clear and help show what you expect of him, and reward big time when he does it on his own.

- Start slow on a leash to give him no other options. Let him start dragging his leash with exercises and if you are successful, let him work off of a shoe lace or pull tab.

- Socialize your puppy with different surfaces such as wire mesh, tarps, sand, ice, water and even climbing on and over logs. Take him over different types of flooring such as slick polished concrete and wood or laminate tile. Open steps are a challenge and are best taught at an early age. Hiking excursions will also help him gain control of his fast growing body frame.

- Making a game of everything will be a positive experience for your dog and he will be less likely to worry about stressful situations. He will be less likely to suffer from agility “burnout” in the future.

- Play some fun puppy games such as having him chase their favorite toy on a long rope. Let them win. Also try running away with the toy for a tag game. This builds prey and play drive and makes you more interesting than the surrounding environment.

- Lastly, the first training experiences and imprint exercises for your Boxer puppy will last a lifetime.

Grasp the opportunity with both hands and you BOTH will surely reap the rewards. It has always been said that “everyone gets the dog that they deserve” and our Boxers deserve the best that we can offer them.

“Train you dog every day as if it is the last day you will ever spend with him”.

