

Building a Better Relationship with Your Dog

To improve your success in agility training it is important that you have a relationship with your dog that is built on respect. Your dog needs to be able to pay attention and focus on you and what you are teaching him in class. There are several things that you can do to foster this type of relationship with your dog. They include:

- 1) While building this relationship, minimize the free time your dog spends on his own. A good way to do this is to keep him in a crate when you do not have time to be with him. When he is not in a crate, he should be with you on a leash. This means around the house, when you take him outside for walks, etc. You can go about your household chore and just ignore your dog. Keep him “tied” to you. Remove all toys you normally have around the house and do not let him play with other dogs. You need to be his center of interest.
- 2) Hand feed your dog his meals. Make him work for his dinner by asking him to do such things as sits and downs.
- 3) Take an obedience class even if you have done so before. Formal obedience helps the dog gain more respect for you.
- 4) Practice obedience skills at home each day. These can include sits, downs, stays, recalls, etc. Work on being able to do down stays for 15 minutes or longer. This can be done while you are sitting watching TV.
- 5) Work attention exercises. Teach your dog to focus his attention on your face.
- 6) Play tug with your dog. If your dog does not like toys to begin with, use a food toy. You can easily make one with an old sock. Fill it with steak, garlic chicken or other smelly food item. Tease the dog with it. Most dogs will take to playing with this toy.

You often have to follow this protocol for several weeks. Eventually your relationship will improve and you and your dog will become more of a team. He will be able to focus on you in class and other settings. At this time you can slowly give your dog back privileges such as being loose around the house, free play, etc.