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Spy Kids

Refining Behaviors and Adding New Criteria

By Nancy Gyes, photos by Marcy Mantell Photography

The Spy kids are four and a half months old now. Everyone is healthy, and their training seems to be progressing at a steady pace. Sweep performed like a seasoned dog when I used him to demo at a puppy lecture last week. It was his first time to “work” in a noisy training building surrounded by people and other kenneled dogs. He was able to demonstrate all the handling games I wrote about last month, like riding on a blanket and or playing kick a pup while tugging. He was energetic during toy play, but responded immediately to cues for sit, down, stand, hand target, close and side, and switched back and forth training for both food and toys.



Luring and Signaling

If you normally have taught behavior in the past while using food or a toy in your hand and while moving or holding your hand in a specific way to cue a behavior, that is called a lure. In a previous article I spoke about teaching the down while I was kneeling on the floor. My kneeling was part of a cue (or signal) for the dog to perform a down and I had to fade that position so that Sweep learned to down anywhere and while I was in any position. If I had added a hand signal of a cookie moving to the ground, that signal would be called a lure. The luring hand is also giving a *signal* to move into the down. This is an easy way to teach the down, but it can be difficult to wean the dog off all the added signals. I would

first need to move out of the kneeling position, while also fading my luring/signaling hand. This adds extra time and complexity to teaching. Try to teach behaviors without lures if possible so that you do not add an additional step to your training. If you have inadvertently taught a physical signal (moving your hand, for example) to get a behavior, fade the signal/lure as quickly as possible so that your dog will respond while you remain still. For agility training we would like our dogs to respond to our verbal cues even when we are out of position.

Hand Targeting

Keep practicing your hand targeting by presenting your hand in a variety of ways. Present both your right and left



hands equally in the following ways: to both your right and left sides, directly in front of you, just over the top of your dog's head so he has to rise up at least an inch or two to be able to target. Place your hand under your dog's chin, lower your hand all the way to the ground, hand target while your dog is on a balance toy in a variety of positions, and down low on the ground as well. Only mark the ones that are good strong nose touches. Don't get in a pattern of only doing nose touches on

one side of you, or allowing your dog to swipe his nose or chin instead of nose bob. Don't ask for hand targeting to line up your dog and then not reward the nose touch or go right onto another behavior after a bad touch.

Don't mark open-mouth hand targeting. This behavior will come back to haunt you when you introduce a physical target to use for contact training. Hold out for a proper nose touch to reward, or you might click early a few times so that your dog cannot complete the targeting. If you seem to lose your nose touch momentarily after clicking early, that's okay. Just present your hand and wait. Then build back up quickly while only marking strong nose touches.

Introducing "Equipment"

Probably the first "equipment" you will teach your pup to use will be a crate. Other apparatus you should introduce are ex-pens, stools, low platforms, balance air-cushions, Buja boards, training planks, and kiddie swimming pools, or small containers holding a few inches of water that your puppy can step into without being lifted.

Each time you introduce your pup to a new piece of equipment you should keep in mind the following guideline: The pup should move onto (under, in, or through) the device step by step, freely without being physically placed or being forced to use the item. Puppies that are allowed to learn equipment in this way rarely become frightened or balk at your use of the items.

Each of these steps to introduce

something new to your pup could be broken down into many smaller steps, but these are the basics. Reward your pup when he

- Looks at the device
- Moves toward it
- Makes contact (foot, nose, or any part of the body touches the item)
- Finally interacts in some way with the equipment

"Interacting" with a Buja board could look like this: touching with paw, touching harder with a paw, putting both front paws on the board, keeping both paws on it, getting on and off the board, standing momentarily with all four feet on it, moving around on the board. Each step should be rewarded. If the pup looks at the board but does not touch it, offer the treat close to the board, after the pup touches



the board, feed while his foot is still in contact if possible. Keep upping the ante in small ways. When using a device you want the pup to move around on or in, try to get the pup to move by feeding a little out of his reach. He will have to move more to get to the treat. If you reward standing still, that is what he will do. Feed the pup instantly after you praise or mark the

progress. Eventually you want to feed or play with the pup while he is on, inside of, or using the device in some way.

When using devices that do not really need to have a specific cue, I have a general cue word I use for getting on things. I say *Hop On*. Sweep will hop on a small box, his balance toys, a Buja board, or even a dog bed.



Stand

Sweep learned to stand on command this past month. We ask him to stand while he is on the grooming table being brushed and having his nails cut, and we include the stand as part of his position training. If you have not yet taught your dog to stand on command, here's an easy way to get started. Gather up your pup and some cookies and sit in a chair with your knees together. Get your pup out in front of you and hold a cookie just over your dog's nose to lure him into a sit, *but don't say sit and don't give out the cookie*. Draw your hand away and keep both of your hands still at your side

or on your lap. Your pup will probably stand up because you did not tell him to sit, and he did not get reinforced for doing so.

Look for any movement of your dog's rear end or rear feet. As soon as your pup stands up or starts to stand up, mark and then feed the cookie just under his chin, almost at his chest, but not while he is in the sit. If your pup moves but does not get out

of the sit or he stands and then sits as soon as you mark it, then toss the cookie between his feet or at his side so he has to stand up to get the treat. I like my dogs to stand up rear end first, rather than walking forward into a stand. The cookie-under-the-chin method works well to get your pup to move his rear end back, rather than his front end forward. Don't feed the pup in your lap, put the

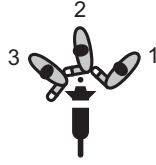
cookie out where you want him to stand or he will continue to move forward. Use your treat delivery to help keep him right where you want him. As soon as he stands up, mark and reward, and continue to hand-feed cookies as long as he stays standing. Because stand is not a complex position for the dog, I add the stand command quite early. As soon as the pup is starting to catch on, I say *Stand* just before marking the behavior. Lure the sit-wait-pup stands-say *Stand*-click-treat. When you really think you are making progress you can ask your pup to sit or down, and then use your cue word to get him to stand.



Close and Side Cues

Jim taught Sweep *Close* by rewarding him in that position hundreds of times. To begin the behavior looked more like a “flip finish” where the dog does a little jump into position. I also taught Sweep to swing into heel position on both the left and right side in the following way.

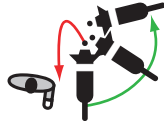
To begin, kneel on the floor with pup on leash and your hand on the snap of the leash. As shown in **Figure 1** gently hold your pup in place, move across your pup’s front end (from position 1 to 2), and wait to see if the pup moves his rear toward your direction. If you get no movement, move yourself again (to position 3) and wait. When the pup moves his rear to realign himself with you, as shown in **Figure 2**, mark and treat. If he fails to move his rear, continue to move across the front of your pup until you



1 The handler moves across the front of the dog and encourages the dog to swing his rear toward the handler.



2 This is how the dog moves his rear to align himself with the handler.



3 Encourage your pup to move his rear end in line with you by calling him up to your side.



reach his hip area. If the pup still does not move, encourage your pup to move his rear end in line with you by calling him up to your side as seen in **Figure 3**. Try to give your cookie with your pup’s head in a straight line with your side. I move, stop, wait for pup to move, then mark and reward. I do this from a kneeling position because with a young pup it is difficult to bend over, hold onto the pup, give quick reinforcements, and keep the pup from tangling in the leash. As soon as I can reliably get some rear movement from my position on the floor, I stand up and finish teaching the swing from there. My cue for the

left-side swing into position is *Close*, the right side is *Side*.

Sweep swings into line with us on these cues and these words also become our heelwork cues on both sides. Essentially I am teaching the dog to find heel position. These positions are extremely important, not just for lining up, but for all your groundwork as well as teaching the front cross and serpentine. In the beginning you will reward your pup for just taking one step with his rear end, and then you can start to expect more. Don’t reward unless he takes two steps to line up with you, and then three, and so on from there.

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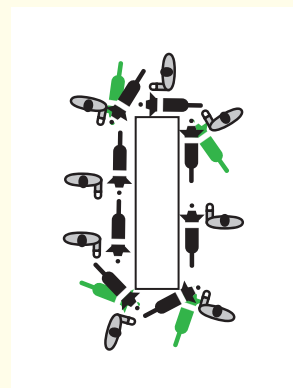


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Square Heeling

Put up an ex-pen and practice heeling around the pen. The pup will be next to the pen and you are on the outside. Practice on both your right and left sides. Stay quite close to the pen, especially at the corners. This is where you can practice having your pup swing into position as you square up on each corner. Reward every couple steps as you get started.

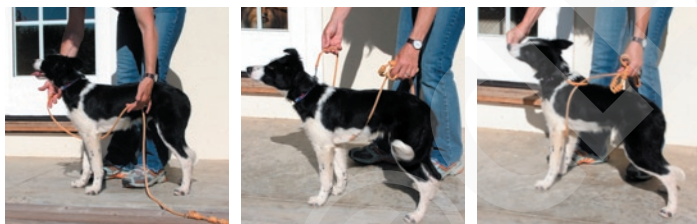
You can also lengthen your pen into a rectangle, or you can set up some other kind of barrier to practice bending around as shown in the diagram at right.



Put up an ex-pen and practice heeling around it. Your pup must swing into position as you square up on each corner.

Walking on Leash

Sweep's manners on leash are quite nice as long as there are no major distractions. We have noticed the places here on our property where Sweep wants to move away from our side and that is where we go to practice. Sweep knows when he is headed to the field for a walk. So we go there often when we are *not* going to go for a walk. We practice for 5 minutes rewarding him many times for being on a loose leash, and *within* 12" of our leg. Then we go do something else and do not go for a walk at that moment. If we absolutely, positively must go somewhere with him when he is too distracted to pay attention and stay on a loose leash, and he is acting like a fish on a line, then we make a harness out of his leash as shown in the photos.



Generally if we do not have his attention we leave the scene and start giving him a treat for each step he takes with us, and then try to move back into the distracting environment while keeping his attention the entire way. If you let your pup drag you somewhere and try to get attention after the fact, you are not helping yourself or the pup. Don't expect your pup's behavior to change until *you* change what you are doing to earn his attention.

When practicing walking on leash I reward like this. Say *Close*, take 3 steps forward, mark and treat *while moving*. Don't stop moving while marking and treating; next take 4 steps, mark/treat, then 5 steps, mark/treat; 6 steps, mark/treat; 7, 8, 9 steps, and so on. If Sweep hits the end of the leash at 9 steps, I stop and wait for him to come back to my side; then he must walk at least 3 steps with me before he gets another mark/treat. These 3 steps with me are well taught and are his *baseline for heeling*. I rarely go below that to reward, unless he is extremely distracted.

Remember: Don't expect to have the skills when you actually need them unless you practice them *before* you need them!

Recalls

Each day your pup should be earning a portion of his daily food allotment for coming when you call. When practicing around the house by yourself, if you can't get your pup to leave you, toss out a piece of kibble (reset cookie). While the pup is running to find it, run somewhere new and call your pup. If you are not getting an almost 80% response around the house, then you need to go back to having your pup on leash, without distractions, and concentrate for a week on training this behavior hundreds of times as your primary focus. If you are getting 100% response around the house you need to raise the bar and add some small distractions. Add only distractions that you can control. Having someone make silly noises or put one of your other dogs in a pen in the same room with some treats or a bone. If this level of distraction is not a problem then have someone wave a bag of cookies around until you call. If this is too much, ask the helper to reduce the level of distraction just before you call your dog. There are hundreds of different distractions around which you can train recalls.

Practice on leash in every distracting environment you can find, and move farther from the distraction if you get no response. Feed multiple cookies, and then release your pup at the end of each recall. Now is also the time to sign up for a local puppy class to be able to expose your dog to other dogs and people and environments as a good distraction. Finding a class that uses clickers would be an added bonus, but would not be an absolute requirement. Look for a class with a qualified instructor who keeps control of the class using food and positive methods, and gives you a forum to practice your skills.

Have fun with your pup this month! 🐾

Nancy Gyes and her husband Jim Basic run Power Paws Agility in San Jose, California. She is the AKC World Team Coach for 2006 and has been on the AKC World Team seven times, four years with Scud and three with Riot. Nancy and Riot finished 1st in 2002 and 2nd in 2001 in Individual Agility classes at Worlds. Nancy also won the USDAA Nationals four years in a row, 1998 to 2001, with three different dogs, Scud, Riot, and Wicked. In 2001 and 2002, Nancy and Riot were the 24" jump height AKC National Champions. Scud retired in 2001 after winning the USDAA Veterans Championship. Contact Nancy at www.powerpawsagility.com, where you can also view other articles and videos.