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Spy Kids

Rules for Access and Off-leash Control

By Nancy Gyes, photos by Marcy Mantell Photography

Sweep and the Spy kids are 16 months old. All five of these male pups are with experienced handlers who have older competition agility dogs. This is the second Border Collie for three of the owners and the first one for the other two. Besides Sweep, I get to see the other pups occasionally at shows, and one of them is in group class here at Power Paws with instructor Moe Strenfel. Their behaviors are pretty typical of driven young male dogs. I think I can safely speak for the owners in making a general statement that teaching these driven dogs to have social skills and good manners has been the main focus of their training. The agility training has come pretty easy now that the pups are learning to delay gratification and realize that there are rules for access to the things they want. They have learned through toy-control games, and stay and crate training to be able to wait for cues that allow access to food and toys.

Zen cookie games, stay training, heel work, and circle work have all been important parts of Sweep's education and of his learning self-control. I hope this training will continue to translate into Sweep's controlling his impulses to react without thinking, like his being able to sit patiently and watch us while waiting for his agility run to begin while another dog is on the course ahead of him. Self-control does not mean that we expect Sweep to have the ability to ignore distractions through some innate ability. He was not born with this understanding; it is taught and will continue to be trained and reinforced, throughout his life. Sweep is far from perfect. He is excited by moving dogs and exciting handlers. Jim works hard at keeping his attention in stimulating environments. This month Sweep is practicing doing 30-minute down-stays and at least 5-minute sit-stays. He is being reinforced at variable times throughout the stay and is simply taken back to the sit or down location if he breaks during the session. The down-stays are trained throughout the house, sometimes while Jim is working at his desk or we are preparing a meal.



Rules for Access

When Sweep sees a toy on the ground or an agility obstacle on the field that he would like to grab, we want his reaction to be one of looking to us for a cue to allow him access to those things. If Sweep wants access to jumps, he has to first move, under control, beside us and off leash to line up by the jump. He also must wait without moving the first time we ask him to sit and stay. If Sweep wants access to a toy in our hand he needs to wait until he is asked to get it. Even though he wants out of his crate in the morning or the front door when we open it, he has learned that he will not be granted access until he does something for us. Sometimes that is a behavior, like lying down in the crate or sitting at the door, or standing patiently and waiting. On the contacts his access to us, the toy, or the next obstacle is cued only after he meets our criteria for performance of his behavior in the contact zone. If Sweep wants access to the field to train he must walk at our side without pulling, otherwise he will not be taken into the training yard.

Herding Dog Stuff

Circling behaviors should not be tolerated in your agility dog. Try not to let your dog circle you or obstacles, and when training agility, do not fix problems by circling back to an obstacle if you have a dog that ever runs around you or an obstacle. See **Figures 1 and 2**. Herding dogs have instinctual circling tendencies. Don't reinforce them. Your dog should always be rewarded for returning directly to the front of you, with his head not passing your side. This is also referred to as the "blind cross body line."

Off-leash Control

Sweep has been taught to stay at both our right and left side through the heel work and flat work previously discussed in these articles. Sweep seems willing to stay with us and is attentive to us while in these positions. Jim will not show Sweep if he cannot heel him into the agility ring off leash. Jim and I normally take our leashes off by the ring gate and take our dogs into the ring off leash. They are under our verbal control and Sweep will be

expected to do the same. I would never compete with a dog that I could not take into the ring off leash; and I expect full attention to line up, and of course for him to stay with me while the previous dog is running. I have always had these goals with all my dogs. I feel that if I cannot even get my dog into the ring off leash, how could I possibly get around the course with him successfully. This applies to the end of the course as well. Our dogs are taught to find their leashes, just like they are taught to go to their toy at the end of a drill. We are teaching Sweep to get his leash at the end of some of the jumping drills. We want him to tug and then stop momentarily to allow us to snap on his leash. After he does so he is invited to tug again.

My life as an agility instructor is divided between teaching classes, seminars, private lessons, and writing. The majority of the private lessons I teach have to do with the handler's lack of control of the dog, the toys, and the food. The lessons do not start that way, but that is how so many of the lessons end. While trying to address tight turns or off-courses, we are really talking about the dog driving back to you when called and not getting behind you. When addressing dogs that jump long, we always end up discussing circle work and the dog's response to heel work, deceleration, and so on. Contacts, table, and start-line problems inevitably lead us to discussion of the dogs' understanding of the stay as well as the release command. Dogs that need speed and motivation rarely have the toy drive or control that you try to build from the beginning of training. While I love my job security because it seems there is an endless supply of these kinds of dogs, I urge you to consider taking my advice and not starting to show your dog until you can get into the ring off leash and have a great stay as well. And that goes for small dogs, too. Put them on the ground! It is way too easy to pick up small dogs and carry them places rather than ask for all the control and groundwork we expect from our large dogs.

Group Class and Private Lessons

The majority of Sweep's training is done without the distractions of other dogs around. Now that Sweep can do jump drills Jim is letting Sweep run in some of the classes he teaches. Like a lot of high-drive Border Collies, Sweep can get excited watching other dogs run, and Jim has to work on keeping Sweep's focus on him, rather than on the other dogs between runs. I think handlers

learn best in private training sessions; there is no way to cover all the aspects of competitive handling in a group class unless the handler is already very experienced. Group classes take care of having a stimulating environment in which to train your dog that may be similar to the excitement your dog will see at a show, and is the way to get your dog on equipment each week. A dog that is out of control though should not be worked in a group class where the dog may become overstimulated unless the handler has methods to regain the dog's attention and focus and ways to reward self-control.

Play, Control, Play

Jim works on taking Sweep from aroused play sessions into quiet control drills. While in the middle of an exciting tug game, he gives the cue to sit or down or hand target. Sweep is rewarded with a treat, or is released to play again after his response to the cue. Teaching your dog to be able to calmly stay in a position like sit or down, or to do heel work, then jump up with animation into a tug game is an important aspect of teaching your dog to be able to control his impulses.

Equipment Update

Sweep weaves! While the winter weather did not oblige Jim's teaching Sweep to weave in a month's time, after two months of training he did his first sets of closed poles this week, no wires and with obstacles before and after. He has a nice lowered slalom style in the poles, and seems to understand his entries and exits.



Sweep is gaining confidence and speed on the full-size dogwalk, and Jim will continue to train with backchaining and speed games like jumping on the low dogwalk from the side. He is proofing Sweep's nose touch and the wait for release by moving himself to different positions after Sweep targets, as well as throwing toys and cookies around while Sweep is performing his nose touches.

16B

If your dog runs around an obstacle either to the inside or outside...

DO NOT continue the circle and present the obstacles again.

DO stop the dog and bring him in to you (or do a front cross into him), and then take the dog back to the beginning of the exercise.

16B

Skipping the first jump on a long lead-out can become a terrible habit for some dogs, herding and non-herding alike. If this happens, go back to doing simple two- and three-jump grid work at low heights.

The running A-frame seems to be holding up and looks reliable at a height of 5'6". The two top stride regulating bumps are still in place. The one at the bottom of the frame has been removed and has been placed 4' from the bottom of the A-frame. Sweep hits in the yellow, hits the ground, jumps the bump, and retrieves his toy. The teeter work is still in progress as described in last month's article.

Sweep practiced the letter "A" Alphabet Drill this month as well as continued training on T drills to work on bending on the

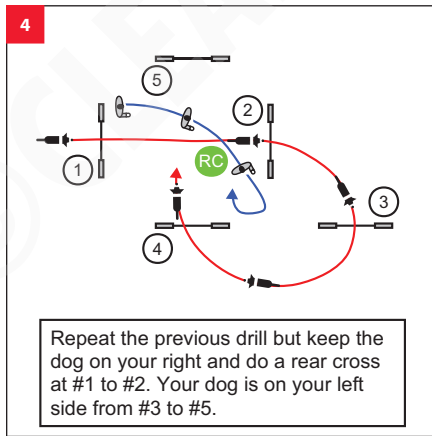
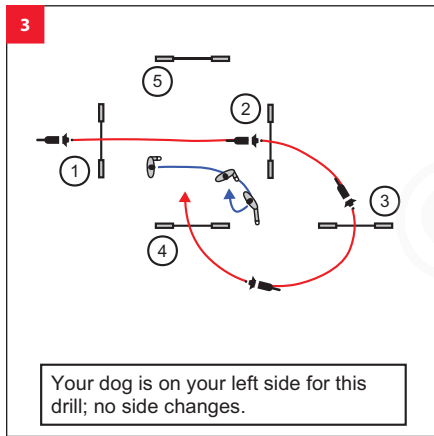
jumps and turning tightly. We are also focusing on simple grid work with Sweep because as his excitement for jumping and speed has increased, the quality of his jumps has decreased and he is taking down a bar once in a while. Some letter A drills are shown in **Figures 3 through 6**. For more letter A drills, go to www.powerpawsagility.com and look in the articles section.

Have fun with the letter A drills and I hope you are enjoying training your pup as much as we do ours.

While we were taking photos Marcy caught Sweep in the act of moving out of his stay and jumping onto the end of the teeter. We don't normally send him from the front of the teeter, but you can see that he understands his job of pulling down the board, flipping himself around, and moving into target position. He found the board and the target too tempting to refuse.



Sweep starts from a sit-stay a few feet in front of the jump. Jim turns as soon as he releases him to jump. Sweep swings in line with Jim over the bar of the jump and is rewarded in the front-cross position.



Nancy Gyes and her husband Jim Basic run Power Paws Agility in San Jose, California. She has been the AKC World Team Coach since 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 the FCI Agility World Championships. 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. Contact Nancy at www.powerpawsagility.com where you can also view other articles and videos.

