Dog Agility
SPECTATORS GUIDE

**What is Agility?**Agility is a team sport where a dog runs through a timed obstacle course as directed by the handler. Handlers use a combination of verbal commands and body language to direct the dog. Agility is fun for both teammates, and strengthens the bond between dog and handler. When a run is going well, dog and handler are completely connected and working together in perfect partnership, even though they may be far apart on the course. Agility requires a high level of training, and even dogs competing at a novice level have probably been training for 6-12 months or more. Agility is taught using positive training. It is an off-leash sport that requires a canine partner who is not only well trained but also happy and enthusiastic.

**What Happens at an Agility Competition?**The officials set up agility equipment inside a 100x100-ft ring. The course is set with numbered cones. Once the course is ready, the competitors “walk the course” without dogs, following the numbers, learning the course, and planning how they will direct their dogs. Each course is different; the competitors only get a few minutes to learn it and **the dogs are never allowed to practice the course in advance. The dogs must rely completely on their handlers to direct them once they enter the ring.**

Once the walkthrough is completed, the competitors enter the ring one by one with their dogs and attempt the course while the judge watches. In order to work toward a title, the team must run “clean” – without any mistakes – and they also must finish under the time limit that the judge has set. Most runs last less than a minute. Dogs that go slowly may be clean but may not make time, and dogs that go extremely fast must still be accurate or they won’t run clean. A qualifying run requires both speed and accuracy.

**Types of obstacles**Agility courses use various obstacles. Jumps are set at different heights depending on the height of the dog. If you see a dog jumping what seem to be low jumps for his size, he may be a senior dog who still loves the game but needs to jump lower because of his age. The biggest obstacles on the course are the A-frame and the dogwalk. Both require the dog to run over them at speed but the dog must come down to the bottom of the ramp at the end, past the white line. This can be challenging for young dogs, who may get excited and jump off the obstacle above the line. Agility also uses tunnels, hoops, and weave poles. In order to perform the weave poles correctly, the dog must always enter to the right of the first pole.

**The Classes**Agility has several classes that require different skills. The Regular class uses all the agility obstacles. Jumpers is a course of all jumps (there may be a tunnel as well). The Weavers class highlights the dog’s skill at performing the weave poles. In Touch ‘n’ Go, the course consists of the dogwalk and A-frame (the “touch” part since the dog must touch the ramp below the white line with at least one paw), hoops, and tunnels ( the “go” part since dogs run through tunnels at speed). Hoopers is a course of hoops and a test of the handler’s ability to direct the dog smoothly through the twists and turns of the course. The Tunnelers class is a favorite for many dogs; with nothing but tunnels to blast through, this course is often run at top speed. Chances is the most challenging course for many teams. In Chances, the course is divided by a line of tape on the ground. The dog must stay on one side of the line and the handler must direct the dog through the course while staying on the other side.

**The Rules**When dog or handler makes a mistake on course, this results in a fault. Faults include dropping a jump bar, going off course (not following the numbered cones), the dog leaving the ring, and other mistakes. A team is also faulted if the dog jumps off the ramp of one of the contact obstacles above the white line. Once a team gets a fault, they cannot earn points on that run towards a title. Handlers do not get upset when a run doesn’t go perfectly. Agility is all about having fun with your dog no matter how the run goes. Agility folks support each other and cheer for even the smallest successes. Besides, most mistakes on course are the handler’s. As a wise trainer once said, “Never blame your dog when things don’t go as planned. Remember who taught him his job!”

**Levels of Competition**Teams start at the Intro or Novice (beginners) level and work their way up to the Open (intermediate) level and Elite (advanced) level. Teams earn the right to move up to a higher level in each of the different classes by earning at least 3 clean runs. Within each level, dogs are divided by size and jump the appropriate height for their size.

**Spectators**Spectators are welcome at agility trials! Competitors are happy to talk to you and answer questions, but please be courteous and use caution around the dogs. ALWAYS ASK the owner’s permission before trying to pet a dog, and make sure your children do as well. Supervise children at all times around the dogs. Agility dogs are highly trained athletes and many are more focused on doing their jobs than socializing.

Do not allow children to run in or near the ring, be loud or disruptive, or hang on ring fencing. Please don’t stand or sit close to the ring, especially while eating. Stay clear of ring entrances and exits and stay out of exhibitor areas unless accompanied by an exhibitor. No flash photography, please. It can be a dangerous distraction. Feel free to clap and cheer!

Leashed, vaccinated dogs are welcome as long as they do not become a distraction for dogs in the ring. For their own safety, please do not bring dogs up into the bleachers.

We hope you enjoy watching the sport we love so much! For more information on agility, speak to a Circle of Friends Dog Agility club member. We’re happy to help.

[www.circleoffriendsagility.com](http://www.circleoffriendsagility.com/)