



This is the second part of a series describing five games that tap into your puppy's love of food and toys and into his natural prey drive to build focus for you (Games 1-3) and value for interacting with nonagility "obstacles" (Games 4 and 5). This month we'll discuss the advanced stages of the games you learned in Part 1 and also put the games together to teach your puppy brilliant responses to your handling maneuvers as he interacts with "obstacles" while responding to handling cues from you.

Puppy Agility Games, Part 2

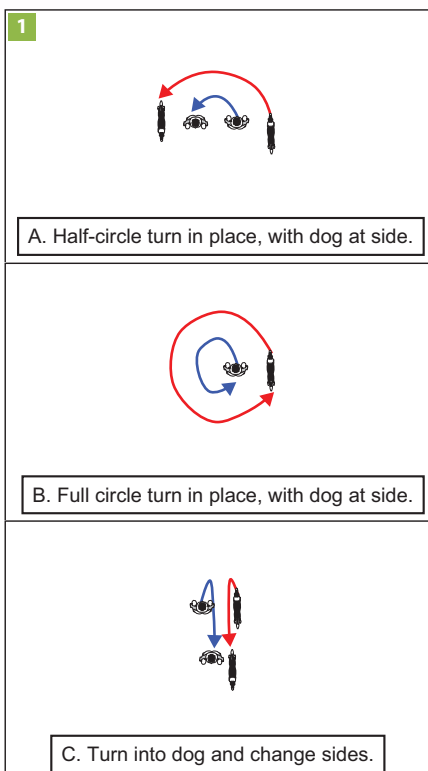
By Anne Stocum, photos by Dianne Spring

These games are designed to be done in very short sets with toy play or interactive food play in between. This ensures that your puppy finds you and the games fun! Don't advance in the stages of the games until you have brilliant response at each stage.

Focus on the Handler Games

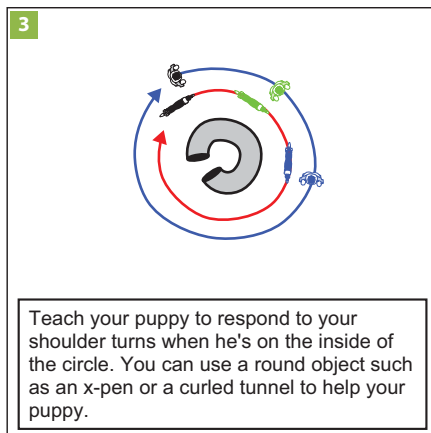
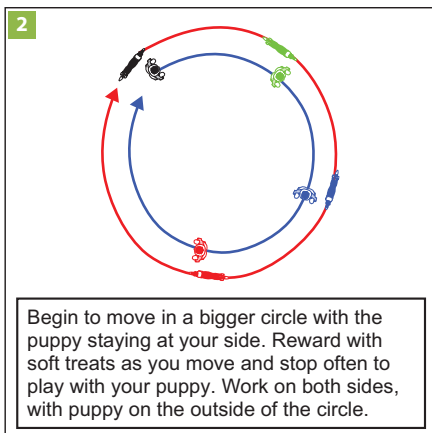
Game 1: I Turn, You Turn!

This game teaches your puppy that when you turn your body, the puppy should turn too. Stages 1-4 of this game (described in the previous article) taught your puppy to stay at your side as you turn a full circle in place. It also taught your puppy to switch sides confidently as you turn into him. Remember to continue to give your puppy lots of rewards for being at your side. See **Figure 1**.



Stage 5: Bigger circles. Start this session by giving your puppy several rewards at your leg using the hand closest to the puppy to reward. Do one circle in place, rewarding a few times. Then moving slowly, make your circle just a little bigger. Reward as the puppy comes with you. If your puppy moves ahead of you, just back up a bit and start over. If your puppy lags behind, pat your leg and encourage him

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to move forward. Be ready to reward when the puppy's head is lined up with your leg. See **Figure 2**.

Stage 6: Adding speed. Once you have your puppy moving slowly in bigger circles, you can add a little more speed by jogging. Again, reward as the puppy comes with you. If your puppy moves ahead of you, just back up a bit and start over. If your puppy lags behind, pat your leg and encourage him to move forward. Be ready to reward when the puppy's head is lined up with your leg.

Stage 7: Inside circles. In Stages 1-6 of this game, your puppy has always been on the outside of the circle. Now you will repeat Stages 1-5 of this game with your puppy on the inside of the circle. This requires the puppy to swing his butt toward you. You can make it easier for you and your puppy to do this exercise by forming a tunnel into a closed circle or an x-pen into a circular

shape. See **Figure 3**. As preparation for this stage, work on rear-end awareness; for example, teach your puppy to keep his front feet on a small stool or box while he turns in place (practice in both directions).

Stage 8: Adding distractions. Once your puppy loves the I Turn, You Turn! game, add distractions, challenging your puppy appropriately. Make a list of distractions and rank them from low (e.g., familiar dogs hanging out in the same room) to high (e.g., outside an agility ring). Work your puppy through Stages 1-7 at all these distraction levels. Use high value rewards and keep the reinforcement rate high. Tell your puppy often how brilliant he is!

Game 2: I Run, You Run!

Stages 1-3 of this game were described in the previous article. In these recall games, the puppy learned to chase

you to be rewarded at your side if you slowed down or turned, and to drive ahead of you when you keep running. Keep working this skill and be sure to vary your starting position.

Game 3: I Stop, You Stop!

This game teaches your puppy brilliant response to your deceleration. Stage 1 of this game (described in the previous article) teaches your puppy to come quickly to your side when you lead out and are standing completely still. Don't move on to the next stages until your puppy is giving you a quick stop at your side.

Stage 2: Moving stop. Put your puppy in a sit-stay. Lead out but keep moving at a walking pace. Release your puppy while still moving and then stop. Time this so that your puppy chases you as you move, but has time to stop when you stop. Reward your puppy at your



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leg and with lots of praise. Work both sides and vary the distance you are from your puppy.

Stage 3: Running stop. Play the game as in Stage 2 except increase your speed to a jog as you move away from your puppy. Increase your distance from your puppy, too, so he has more speed as he chases you and will have to work harder to stop at your side.

Stage 4: Adding distractions. Once your puppy has had lots of reinforcement for this behavior, add some distractions. Place a low value toy or covered food dish on the floor in front of where you will stop. Does the puppy choose to stop at your side or go beyond you to get the toy?

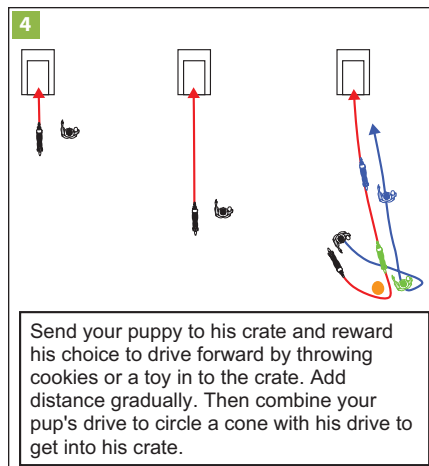
Focus on the Obstacle Games

Game 4: Send to Crate/Bed

If you have worked through Stages 1 and 2 of this game, your puppy should love his crate or bed and fight you to get in it. Remember to use a soft crate for this game since your puppy will be

running into the crate and you don't want him to bang his body on a hard crate. If you are using a bed, put it on a surface that will keep it from sliding (like grass or a rug).

Stage 3: Add distance. Play with your puppy to get him into a good state of arousal and then send him to his crate from a little farther away. Use your arm and leg to cue the puppy to go forward, as though you were sending him to a jump or a tunnel. This gives your puppy a consistent cue to move away from you toward the "obstacle." Once you have good distance, run with your puppy toward the crate and throw your reward into the crate. You want your puppy to keep his head forward and drive to his crate. You can try restraining him gently and only let go when he looks at his crate. If he seems uncertain or looks back at you, the puppy may not yet have enough value for the crate or you may have added distance too fast. Sometimes release your puppy immediately from the crate so that he is always guessing what might happen next. See **Figure 4**.





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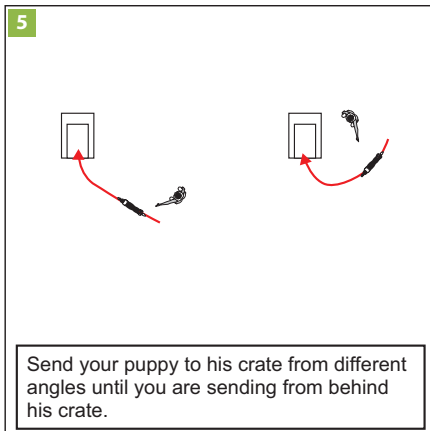
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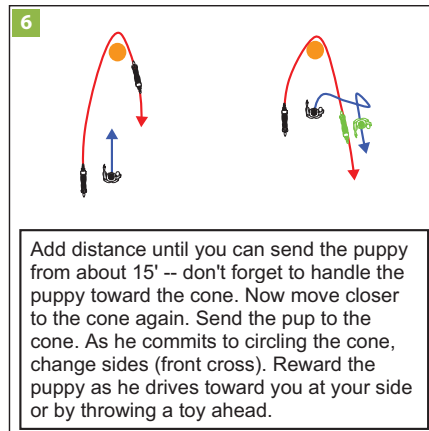
Stage 4. Add angles. This stage only works if you have been using a crate rather than a bed. Once your puppy is driving to his crate, line him up at angles to the crate. Eventually, you can be behind the opening of the crate and the puppy will have to work to find the opening, just as if he was finding the opening of a tunnel. See **Figure 5.**

Enjoy your puppy and remember to keep it fun with lots of rewards! As discussed in the first article, building a relationship with your puppy is the most important work you can do with him in that first year. Make yourself the best reward for your puppy by pairing rewards he loves with fun interactions with you.

Game 5: Circle the Cone

If you have worked through Stages 1 and 2 of this game, your puppy should understand and have value for circling a traffic cone.

Stage 3: Adding more distance. Like the previous game, using the crate, gradually add distance so that you can start the puppy from 10'-15' away. Be sure to handle the puppy toward the cone by sending with an arm and leg and driving toward the cone until he



is committed. You want the puppy to keep his head forward and focused on the cone. If he is hesitant or looks back, he may not yet have enough value for the cone and you may need to back off on the distance. Or it may be that you are supporting him enough with handling. If you stand still and upright and ask your puppy to go to the cone, you are working against the deceleration cues that you have been teaching in the handler-focus games. Vary the distance from the cone, but don't always make it harder! See **Figure 6.**

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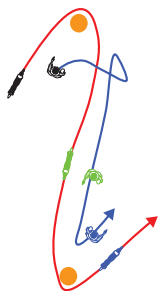
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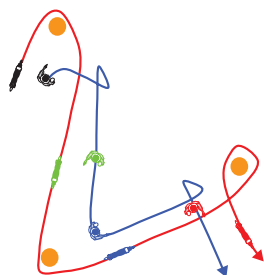


Once your puppy is brilliant in sending and circling one cone, add a second cone to perform figure-8 patterns.

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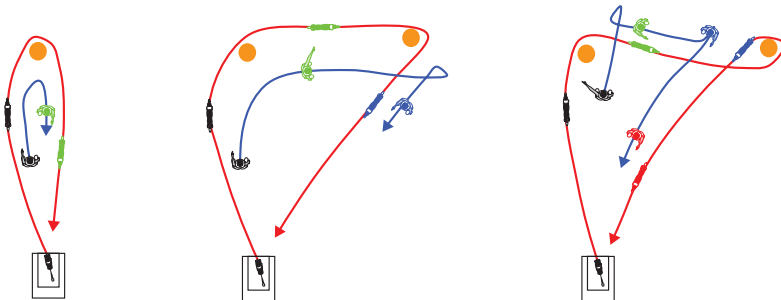


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Add a third cone and vary the spacing between cones to create more complex handling patterns.

10



Start puppy from a sit-stay in his crate. Lead out just a bit, release, and run toward the cone. As your puppy approaches the cone, decelerate. As the puppy circles the cone, turn back toward the crate and drive the puppy to it. Add a second cone to create more patterns.

Handling Games

Once your puppy has mastered the five individual games, you can put them together in a variety of ways to “handle” your puppy on his newly mastered “obstacle” performance and his understanding of your cues.

Cone Figure-8s

Add a second cone about 8' from the first cone. Send your puppy to the first cone. As he goes around the first cone, do a front cross and send him to the second cone. Reward often. Gradually move the cones farther apart. You should be watching for the puppy to seek out the cone as you send him. If he is hesitating or looking back at you, you may have added too much distance too soon. See **Figures 7 and 8**.

Cone Triplets

Add a third cone and use your imagination to create patterns around three cones. Be sure to always handle your puppy around the cones and to reward often. See **Figure 9**.

Acceleration/Deceleration Games

Place a cone about 20' from your puppy's crate. Have your puppy sitting in his soft crate with the door open. Lead out just a bit in “game on” position. Release your puppy and run hard toward the cone. As the puppy approaches the cone, decelerate to indicate that you want him to circle the

cone. As he circles, pick up your speed again and drive your puppy toward his crate. Reward his drive into the crate by throwing a toy into the crate or a few easy-to-find cookies.

Crate-Cone Combinations

Use a crate and two cones to create additional combinations. See **Figure 10**. These are just some ideas to get you started. Use your imagination to create more patterns. Be sure to observe your puppy's response to your handling of these “obstacles.” Is he driving toward his crate? Is he tight to the cone as he goes around it? Does he respond quickly to your changes of direction and arm changes? Does he stay on the line you have set? Look for brilliance from your puppy at all the stages of the games.

Progressions

Continue to work all the stages of these five games often to help your puppy understand response to your handling cues and to build value for the “obstacles.” Enjoy your puppy and remember to keep it fun with lots of rewards! As discussed in the first article, building a relationship with your puppy is the most important work you can do with him in that first year. Make yourself the best reward for your puppy by pairing rewards he loves with fun interactions with you. 🐾

Anne Stocum lives in upstate New York and has been involved in dog agility for nearly 15 years. She enjoys teaching all levels of agility and helping teams achieve their best through consistent handling and good dog training that builds a solid foundation, and that is fun for both handler and dog. Anne has competed 10 times in national finals (AKC and USDAA) with her Shelties Breeze and Lacey. She and Breeze were also members of the 2010 AKC/USA World team. Anne blogs about raising her Border Collie, Tai, at annestocumagility.wordpress.com.