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Preventing Lagging; Adding Momentum to the Recall

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Our last article covered starting the dog on the first action of the Three-Action Introduction--coming to the handler. We'll now complete this action.

Teaching Your Dog to "close up" into the Heel Position

This exercise teaches the dog to come forward from a lagging position into the heel position. It is good preparation before using the collar to correct a dog that lags while heeling. It gives you the foundation you need before you use the collar for problems in the finish. The closing-up technique also helps advanced obedience dogs gain understanding of the remote trainer. These dogs have such a high understanding of the correct heel position that you cannot use a remote trainer for the "rough heeling" described in our last article, because they're never that far out of place.

In this exercise, you'll start the dog from a position about four feet behind you. You'll begin mild stimulation when you command "Heel," and stop the stimulation when the dog reaches heel position. The four steps to teaching "closing-up heeling" are as follows:

1. First, familiarize the dog with the exercise without stimulation.
2. The dog "closes up" to a stationary handler. As soon as the dog arrives in the heel position, the handler walks the dog forward, praising it and then releasing it.
3. The dog "closes up" to a stationary handler, and sits at heel. The handler praises and releases the dog from a stationary position.
4. The dog "closes up" to a **moving** handler, with the handler continuing a few



Teaching the dog to turn off the collar by closing up into the heel position can be used to correct lagging.

more paces before stopping with a sit, praise and release.

Introducing the Exercise. Start by familiarizing the dog with the exercise without using the collar. With the dog on a six-foot leash, leave it on a sit, and step forward about four feet, with your back to the dog. You are going to call the dog forward into the heel position. Keeping your back toward the dog, look over your shoulder and make eye contact with the dog. Tell it to heel without using stimulation. Use the leash to guide the dog if it gets confused. Otherwise, leave the leash slack.

Don't worry if the dog closes up to you a little tentatively. This is probably a new picture for it, so just encourage it to come forward by repeating the command and using some "body English" if needed. When the dog arrives at the heel position, say "Heel" before it sits, walk a few paces, then praise and release. Reward the dog with a treat or toy if this is part of your normal training.

"Closing up" to a Stationary Handler. After a few repetitions without stimulation, begin applying mild stimulation with the first "Heel" command. Release the button when the dog arrives in the heel position, but don't move forward until it arrives. Then, before it can sit, repeat "Heel" without stimulation and quickly take a few steps forward with the dog at heel. Then praise and release it.

After a few repetitions, you should stop walking the dog forward when it arrives at heel. Just release the button as it arrives, and tell it to sit if it hasn't already. Praise and release the dog from a sit.

"Closing up" to a Moving Handler. Finally, change the sequence so that you start walking forward the moment you press the button and say "Heel." Now the dog must catch up with a *moving* handler to turn off the collar. Don't move too fast at first; shorten your stride so the dog can reach you easily for some early success. Then gradually make things more challenging by walking normally.

Release the button and praise the dog when it catches up. Walk several more paces with the dog in the heel position before you release it.

"Beating the Correction." Repeat until you see the dog moving quickly to get into the heel position. Then do a few repetitions without stimulation, letting the dog think it "beat the correction" by moving quickly. Always praise the dog when it arrives at the heel position.

Anticipation. If the dog tries to follow you as you leave, take it back to where you left it and remind it verbally to stay (don't use the collar). Don't look over your shoulder and make eye contact until you're ready to call it to heel.

If the dog is determined to anticipate, don't make an issue of "stay." After all, the dog is just trying to beat the correction, which is your ultimate goal. Instead, attach a long line to the dog. Have a helper stand behind the dog holding the long line to keep the dog from following you.

Using the Correction. This is not an exercise to drill on repeatedly. A couple of short sessions will normally be plenty to teach the dog how to close up distance and get into the heel position. Now you can use the correction any time your dog lags during heeling. Repeat the "Heel" command as you apply stimulation for

lagging. Cheerfully praise the dog for getting into the heel position, even though you had to correct it.

Adding Momentum to the Recall

So far, your dog has learned to identify you as a desirable place to be. You can use this understanding to build the dog's momentum as it comes in toward you.

You'll need a helper to operate the transmitter and control the tension on a long line. The helper should wear a glove to protect his hand as the long line slides through his fingers.

There are three stages in teaching momentum:

1. Familiarize the dog with the exercise without stimulation.
2. Short distance recalls, with stimulation turning off just as the dog reaches the handler.
3. Longer distance recalls, with stimulation turning off when the dog pulls the line free.



Requiring the dog to try harder to get to you will increase momentum on the recall exercise

Introducing the Exercise. Put the dog on a long line. Have a helper hold the long line and stand behind the dog. Start close, with you about 8 feet from the dog and the dog about 12 feet from the helper. Having the dog closer to you than to the helper helps the dog succeed. Do not put the dog on a "stay." The helper will prevent the dog from following you.

In a happy, excited tone, call the dog to encourage it to pull on the long line as you leave it. Turning away from the dog and running will help some dogs try to get to you. You can also try bending down the way you'd call a puppy. But don't throw food or toys at this stage. Just use a happy voice and body motion as the attraction. Praise with enthusiasm when the dog arrives. Don't use the Tri-Tronics collar during the familiarization stage of the exercise.

The helper should release the long line when the dog pulls. Do several repetitions, starting with light resistance on the long line, and encouraging the dog to pull harder each time before the line is released. Praise the dog excitedly when it gets to you.

Do several repetitions without stimulation to get the dog familiar with the idea of pulling the long line. (Although you won't use stimulation with your first command, be prepared to use it and repeat the recall command if the dog turns around and tries to go to the helper.)

Short-Distance Momentum Exercise. After the dog is comfortable with pulling the long line, the helper should begin applying low-level continuous stimulation

just as he begins to restrict the dog with the line. The helper should let the long line slide through his gloved hand as the the dog pulls, and release the button just as the dog arrives at the handler.

Do a series of three to four repetitions at this short distance (the dog starting about 8 feet away from the handler). Apply low-level stimulation each time, and stop the stimulation when the dog arrives at the handler. The dog is now learning that arriving at the handler turns off the collar.

The helper should gauge releasing the long line to the dog's effort, so that the dog tries harder each time. The handler should always encourage the dog with praise and excitement.

Adding Distance--Stimulation Stops as the Dog Pulls Free. When you see the dog pulling and trying harder to get to you, begin increasing distance by starting the dog farther from you. Now the helper should release the transmitter button at the same time as he releases the long line. The dog is learning that trying hard to get to you turns off the collar.

The helper should continue to ask for a little more effort from the dog with each repetition. The handler should continue to give the dog a lot of encouragement and praise for its effort.

Continue the procedure for another three or four repetitions at increased distances. In later sessions, increase both distance and long line pressure. Usually two or three sessions will be plenty for the dog to learn this exercise.

Using the Correction. Now the dog has learned to increase its momentum in a recall situation in order to turn off the collar, a very useful skill. Any time the dog dawdles, slows down, or becomes distracted as it comes toward you in an exercise, use brief, mild stimulation as you give a second recall command. Maintaining a good pace will become a habit for the dog.

Coming in our Next Article

Our next article will cover using the first action to solve some common problems.

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