

Teaching Your Dog a “CLOSE” Behavior

By Amanda Shyne, photos by Alicia Dube



Close is a term I use to communicate to my dogs that I want them to stay at my side and bypass all obstacles until I verbally release them. In many ways, close is similar to heel position. The difference is that my dogs are required to run around and not take obstacles in their path. Due to the similarities between heel and close, I do not begin teaching close until my dog has mastered the heel position. When my dog is proficient at finding and remaining in heel, regardless of my speed, I begin teaching him the verbal command, *Close*.

The purpose of the following exercises is to teach your dog that *Close* means to disregard all handler motion and simply fall into position. This is one of few cues that requires my dogs to disregard my motion. *Close* and other verbal cues (such as *Right* and *Left*) are not naturally understood by dogs; therefore, they require extensive training. These cues also need more maintenance training than handling cues that are based on motion. It is important to revisit these

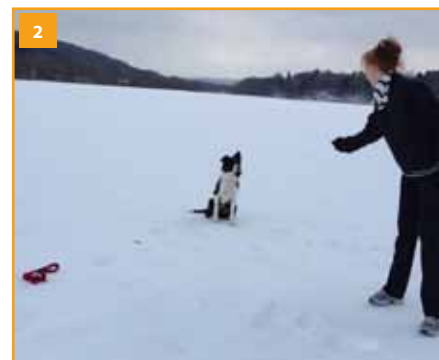
exercises often to get the most out of *Close*. It's a useful cue for Jumpers and Standard and you can have a blast using it while running Snooker!

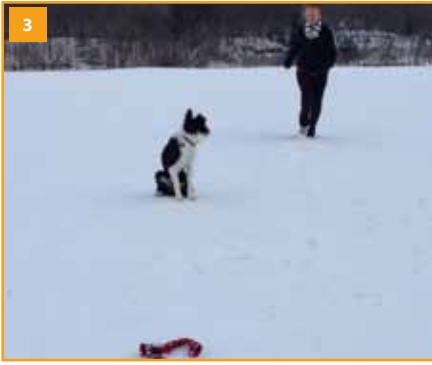
EXERCISE 1: BYPASS A TOY

Procedure: Select two reinforcers of differing value to your dog. Place the lower value reinforcer on the ground and keep the higher value reinforcer in your hand. Put your dog in a sit-stay about 5' behind the reinforcer on the ground. When asking your dog to stay, position him in such a way that he is facing slightly away from the reinforcer on the ground as in

Figure 1. Move to a position about 5' in front of your dog so that you, the reinforce, and your dog form a triangle as shown in **Figure 2**. Cue your active side by opening your shoulder and making strong eye contact with your dog. Then release your dog forward to your active hand. As he falls into position, pull out the high-value reinforcer and reward him lavishly. If your dog attempts to approach the reinforcer on the ground, tell him to *Leave it* and call him to your side.

Repeat this exercise several times always making sure that your active side is the one closest to the reinforc-





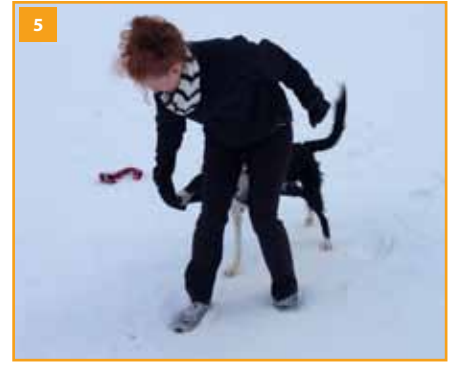
er on the ground so your dog is bypassing the toy or food to get to your side. As your dog progresses and you become confident that he will run by the toy, add the word *Close* after your verbal release. Gradually change your dog's starting position so that while in a stay he is facing the reinforcer on the ground rather than you.

Troubleshooting: If your dog continues to approach the reinforcer on the ground, replace the toy or food with a Manners Minder/Treat & Train or a Ready Treat that you can remotely control.



EXERCISE 2: BYPASS A TOY WITH SPEED

Procedure: The setup for this exercise is similar to the last, but this time you are going to add motion. Place your dog in a sit-stay with a reinforcer on the ground a few feet in front of him. Move 5' behind your dog and slowly start walking forward. As you pass your dog, clearly present your active side. The active side is cued by eye contact, an open shoulder, and, in this situation, a low hand—all of which should encourage your dog to come directly to your side. Verbally release your dog and say *Close*. If



your dog comes to your side rather than running to the reinforcer on the ground, reward him enthusiastically (at your side) and then give him permission to get the reinforcer on the ground. See **Figures 3 through 5**. As you continue to play with this exercise, vary your speed and the location of the reinforcer.

EXERCISE 3: CLOSE BY A TUNNEL

Procedure: Set up a short straight tunnel. Place your dog in a sit-stay behavior approximately 5' from the entry of the tunnel. Initially position





your dog at a slight angle so he is facing you, not the tunnel as in **Figure 6**. Clearly designate your active side—the side that is closest to the tunnel. Release your dog and say *Close*, while inviting him into heel position. Open your shoulder and maintain eye contact as your dog moves to your side. If your dog ignores the tunnel and moves to your side, reward him enthusiastically as shown in **Figure 7**.

Repeat this exercise several times, gradually changing your dog's starting position so eventually he is fac-

ing directly at the tunnel when you release him and give the *Close* command. As you train, make sure you sometimes ask your dog for the tunnel so he learns it is the special word, *Close*, that trumps the tunnel, any other obstacles, and handler motion.

Troubleshooting: If your dog is struggling to come to your side with the tunnel luring him away, move your dog a few feet farther away from the tunnel and change his angle from the tunnel to make it easier for him to ignore the obstacle as in **Figure 8**.

EXERCISE 4: RUNNING BY A TUNNEL

Procedure: This exercise is essentially the same as the last; however, you are going to add handler motion which makes it more difficult for your dog to attend to the verbal command *Close*. Set up a short straight tunnel and place your dog in a sit-stay about 5' behind the entry. Then move 5' behind your dog and start walking forward slowly. As you pass your dog, give your release and say *Close*. If your dog comes to your side as you continue moving forward past

The *Close* command allows me to smoothly cue course direction in situations when I am out of place or farther behind my dog than I had planned during the walkthrough.

the tunnel entrance, reward him enthusiastically!

Repeat this exercise, varying both your speed and the moment at which you release your dog. The faster you move, the more difficult this exercise becomes. Additionally, the later you give the *Close* command, the harder it will be for your dog to pull off the tunnel and come to your side. Have fun proofing this exercise, but be sure to give the *Close* command early enough that your dog is physically capable of pulling off the tunnel and moving to your side.

**EXERCISE 5:
JUMP, CLOSE, JUMP, CLOSE**

Procedure: Set up the sequence of jumps shown in **Figure 9**. Walk slowly on a straight line next to the four jumps. Initially ask your dog to come in *Close* so he bypasses the first jump as in **Figure 10**. Continue walking slowly and cue your dog to take jump #2, then ask him to come in *Close* so he bypasses jump #3, and then finally ask him to take jump #4.

Repeat this exercise varying which jumps you ask your dog to take and which ones you ask him to bypass. As you increase your speed, you also increase the difficulty for your dog. In addition, as your speed increases it becomes increasingly difficult for you to time your verbal *Close* cue. Make sure you give the cue early enough that your dog is physically capable of coming to your side.

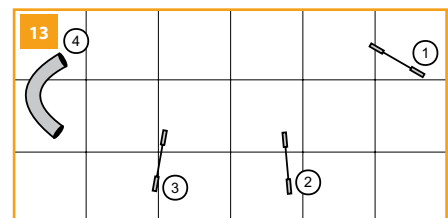
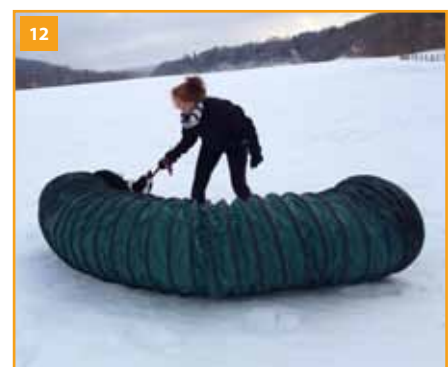
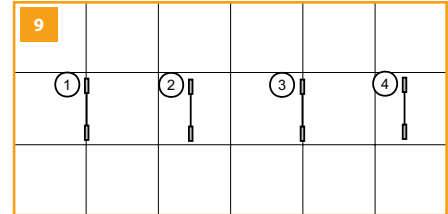
**EXERCISE 6:
C-SHAPED TUNNEL**

Procedure: Set up a C-shaped tunnel. Begin with your dog loose at your side, facing one of the tunnel entrances as in **Figure 11**. Say *Close* and walk by the tunnel entrance. As your dog passes the open tunnel, reward him with an enthusiastic game of tug or a number of small high-value food rewards. See **Figure 12**. If your dog is doing well with this game, increase your speed and vary the behavior you ask of your dog. Sometimes ask him to come in *Close* and other times ask him to take the tunnel.

**EXERCISE 7: FAST LINE
INTO A C-SHAPED TUNNEL**

Procedure: Set up the sequence in **Figure 13**. Position your dog behind jump #1 and lead out to a location that will allow you to be even with your dog as he takes jump #3. Release your dog and take off running for the tunnel. As your dog takes off for jump #3, give your *Close* command. Other than clearly cuing your active side, give no other physical cues to help your dog. You may repeat the verbal *Close* multiple times. As your dog comes to your side, verbally reward him then release him to the correct entrance of the tunnel.

Regardless of your preferred handling strategy for this sequence, there are times when you are out of place or simply unable to get to where you want to be. The *Close* command allows me to smoothly cue course direction in situations when I am out of place or farther behind my dog than I had planned during the walkthrough. 🐾



Amanda has been competing in agility for 10 years. She and her Border Collie Dilly were 2008 and 2009 USDAA Dog Agility Steeplechase finalists at the Cynosport World Games. They were also finalists in 2007-2009 in the Grand Prix at Cynosport, placing 3rd in 2008. Amanda is a tenured professor of Psychology at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts and teaches classes in statistics, learning, dog evolution, and animal behavior. She is a frequent agility seminar presenter and can be contacted at amandashyne@gmail.com.