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AGILITY  
FOR BEGINNERS  
EVERYTHING YOU  
NEED TO KNOW

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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## WHAT IS AGILITY?

Overview - 4

Where have you seen it before? - 5

A sport for all breeds - 6

Obstacles - 7

Benefits of agility - 10

## READY TO TEST THE WATERS?

What to know before you start - 12

Safety - 15

Find a class - 17

Practice at home - 18

## READY TO TRY YOUR HAND - PAW -IN COMPETITION?

Levels of competition - 21

Scoring - 22

What to know before entering a competition - 23

Where to find a club and trials - 25

Glossary of agility terms - 26

## FUR-REAL LIFE

A dog named Roo! - 28

Who we are and what we do - 29

Other AKC ebooks - 30



*chapter one*  
**WHAT IS AGILITY?**

# OVERVIEW

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Agility is the ultimate activity for you and your dog. Designed to demonstrate a dog's willingness to work with his handler in a variety of situations, agility is an athletic event that requires conditioning, concentration, training and teamwork. Dogs and handler must negotiate an obstacle course while racing against the clock. The obstacle course includes jumps, weaves, poles and other fun objects. It provides fun and exercise for both the dog and handler.



previous page: Amy Johnson/Great Dane Photos/©AKC; this page: Lisa Croft-Elliott/©AKC

# *where have you* SEEN IT BEFORE?

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Agility holds strong spectator appeal so, even if you do not recognize it by name, you have probably seen the dog obstacle course competition on TV. The AKC's top annual agility events include the AKC Agility Invitational and the AKC National Agility Championship. In 2013, the Westminster Kennel Club put the media spotlight on agility when it added the sport as the opening act before its annual prestigious conformation dog show held in New York City. The finals of the first Westminster agility trial were broadcast live on the Fox Sports network.



Amy Johnson/Great Dane Photos/©AKC



# *a sport* FOR ALL BREEDS

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## AKC CANINE PARTNERS PROGRAM

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You may have thought that agility is limited to breeds like the Shetland Sheepdog, Border Collie and Poodle, but dogs of all shapes & sizes can excel at agility. In 2010, the American Kennel Club launched the AKC Canine Partners program, opening the door to allow mixed-breed dogs to compete in many AKC events, including agility. The program is for any dog that is not eligible for full AKC registration, including rescues, purebreds “without papers,” and rare breeds. Dogs must be spayed or neutered to enroll in the Canine Partners program. Dogs enrolled in the Canine Partners program have earned numerous titles in the sport, including taking home first place at AKC national agility events.



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# OBSTACLES

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## DOG WALK

The Dog Walk consists of a center section and two ramp sections. Dogs must ascend one of the ramps, cross the center section, and descend the other ramp in the direction designated by the judge.

## A-FRAME

The A-Frame is constructed from two panels. Dogs must ascend one panel and descend the other in the direction designated by the judge.

## SEESAW

The Seesaw consists of a plank (or panel) that is supported near the center by a base that acts as a fulcrum. Dogs must ascend the plank touching the “up” contact zone with any part of one foot and cause the plank to pivot.

## BAR JUMPS

Bar Jumps consist of bars held in place by bar supports mounted to uprights. Dogs must jump over the top bar, without displacing it. The height of the jump in the class is determined by the dog’s height at its withers. (See page 25 for more information.)



Amy Johnson/Great Dane Photos/©AKC; Third from top: Lisa Croft-Elliott/©AKC

# OBSTACLES

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## WEAVE POLES

Dogs must enter the Weave Poles by passing between poles number 1 and number 2 from right to left and continue this weaving sequence until they exit between the last two poles.

## OPEN TUNNEL

The Open Tunnel is a flexible tube of durable material that can be formed into curved shapes. Dogs enter the end specified by the judge and exit the other end.

## CLOSED TUNNEL

The Closed Tunnel, also known as the chute, consists of a rigid entrance section, with an attached fabric chute for the dogs to push through. Dogs must enter the rigid entrance section and exit through the fabric chute.

## TRIPLE BAR JUMP

The Triple Bar Jump consists of a series of three ascending bars. Dogs must jump over all the bars, without displacing any, in the direction that starts with the lowest bar.



Top: Robert Young/©AKC; Bottom three: Doghouse Arts ©AKC



# OBSTACLES

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## DOUBLE BAR JUMP

The Double Bar Jump consists of two parallel bars, 5 feet in length, positioned at the jump heights specified for the Bar Jump. Dogs must jump over the top bars without displacing either one.



## PANEL JUMP

The Panel Jump uses six cross-boards to give the illusion of a solid wall from the jump height to the ground. Dogs must jump over the top board without displacing it.



## TIRE JUMP

The Tire Jump consists of a tire (or a circular object that resembles a tire) suspended from a rectangular frame. Dogs must jump through the tire opening without breaking the tire segments apart or knocking the tire frame over.



## BROAD JUMP

The Broad Jump is composed of either four or five sections, and four corner markers. The sections are constructed from a top piece and two side pieces. Dogs must jump all sections without visibly moving or stepping on top of or between any Broad Jump board.

## PAUSE TABLE

The height of the table will vary depending on the jump-height division. The dog shall pause on the table for five consecutive seconds. The dog can be in any position as long as all four paws are touching the tabletop.

# *the benefits* OF AGILITY

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You do not have to compete to enjoy agility. Taking an agility class offers numerous benefits for both your dog and you. But, warning, many people start the sport just for fun, only to get bitten by the agility bug and become lifelong competitors!

## BENEFITS INCLUDE:

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- Confidence building – Agility is a great way to build confidence in insecure dogs. Conquering obstacles shows them life is not so scary and that they can do anything!
- Strengthens Dog-Owner Bond – Agility is a team sport. It requires great communication and trust between dog and handlers.
- Exercise – Taking an agility class means getting active for both your dog and you.
- Fun – Most important, it is cherished time that you and your dog spend enjoying an activity together!





*chapter two*  
READY TO TEST  
THE WATERS?



# *what to know*

## BEFORE YOU START

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Basic obedience commands are important to learn before starting agility so the dogs can be comfortable, focused and under control while learning a new and exciting sport.

### Sit

One of the basic commands that you will want to teach your puppy is to sit. There are two ways to do this. Learn them [here](#).

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### Down

“Down” is one of the five basic commands that you should teach your dog. Click [here](#) for more.

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### Stay

A puppy who knows the “Stay” command will remain sitting until you let him get up by giving him another command, called the “release word.” (This may be something like “OK!” or “Go.”) Check it out [here](#).

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### Come

There are so many important commands for your dog to learn, but the most important is “come.” It only takes a second for even the most well-behaved dog to see a squirrel and dart into traffic. A strong recall can be the difference between life and death. Learn more [here](#).

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For more information on the Basic Commands, you can download our Owner’s Manual for [The Five Basic Commands Every Dog Should Know](#).

For additional training resources, and to find an obedience class near you, please visit <http://www.akc.org/dog-owners/training/>



# *what to know*

## BEFORE YOU START

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### OFF-LEASH ETIQUETTE

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Off-leash etiquette should be practiced in a secure, fenced-in area.

Once your dog knows the basic commands, begin offleash training with your dog attached to a long leash, to keep a connection with him. Call your dog to you and give him his favorite toy so he learns that staying with you is always rewarded.

When your dog becomes distracted or drifts away from you, turn and run the other way, calling his name. Then play and reward when he catches up to you.

Teach your dog to walk next to you on both your right and left sides, using a treat in your hand as a lure to start. Keep your dog on leash, but throw the leash over your shoulders, tie it around your waist, or tuck the end in your pockets so you keep a connection but your hands are not directing the dog.

You can ask whether or not the agility training class is inside, outside in a fenced area, or outside in an open area so you can be prepared.

### SOCIALIZATION

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- There will be many other dogs in close proximity to your pup when at an agility training class. It is important that your dog knows his manners and is properly socialized.
- Friendly and social is good, but you don't want your dog too excited because he may find it hard to concentrate if he is "over his threshold."
- If your dog is aggressive or fearful, work to socialize him before bringing him to a class.

# *what to know* BEFORE YOU START

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## WHAT MOTIVATES YOUR DOG?

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Every dog has a distinct personality and will work extra hard for different things. Some prefer petting behind the ears, others a treat or their favorite toy.

It is important to speak your dog's language and find what motivates him. This will make training rewarding and fun for the both of you and keep your dog's attention for the duration.

Find your dog's motivation and reward hard work with what makes him happy.



# SAFETY

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## SAFETY

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### Your Dog's Physical Health

Make sure your dog doesn't suffer from any physical ailments that might make agility too hard or dangerous for them.

### Puppies

Your puppy should be physically mature and its growth plates should have closed before starting formal agility training and tackling any full-height jumps or contact obstacles. Your veterinarian can advise you when your puppy's growth plates have closed. This is to prevent strain on your dog's developing joints that could lead to physical problems as he gets older. Most training clubs and schools offer puppy agility classes or agility foundation classes, which offer training in skills that will help dogs succeed once they are old enough to join a formal agility class. Dogs in agility training should be in good health and proper weight to avoid exhaustion and health risks.

### Your Physical Health

Agility requires a good amount of running around for both you and your dog, so it's important to make sure that you are in decent shape and good health before you begin training.

### Vaccines Required

All dogs must be up to date on their vaccines before training begins.

# SAFETY

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## LOW AND SLOW

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Some people think that agility is a high-jump contest and start a dog on jumps that are too high, and on full-height contact obstacles, “just to see if they can do it.” This can lead to dogs falling, becoming scared of obstacles and/or getting injured. You want to start everything low and slow until your dog is proficient at that level, and then slowly move up. Your dog should only jump at his proper jump height (see the jump heights list- ed in “Ready to try your hand— and paw— in competition” section). Your dog will never need to jump higher, even when he’s fully trained.

## SET YOUR GOALS

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### ***Evaluate what level you and your dog are on and want to reach***

- Setting goals will help you know where to start and help to keep you moving forward and improving.
- Your dog will likely start at the beginner/novice level, and this will allow them to get comfortable with the tasks and obstacles.
- Stay calm, be realistic, take it slow, reward achievements and most importantly have fun!



# FIND A CLASS

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## CLUB COMPETITION VS. CLASSES – WHERE DO I START?

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### Finding a class near you

We highly recommend joining a training club if you wish to get started with agility. Most clubs will offer beginner classes.

*Find a Club*

You can take agility classes independent from club affiliations and competitions—choose what makes you the most comfortable. You can always change your mind or move onto competitions when you and your dog feel ready.

*Agility can be something you do just for fun.  
It is whatever you choose to make it.*

# *practice* AT HOME

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There are many skills that you can practice at home that will enhance your dog's agility performance. These include:

**Tricks** – Tricks increase your dog's confidence, aptitude and coordination – all traits that help with agility.

- Right and Left
- Weave through your legs
- Back-up

**Wrap** – Teach your dog to turn tightly around a cone, barrel or something similar. This will aid them in turning tightly over jumps in the future.

**Side** – Reward your dog for walking by both your right and left side. Agility dogs must be able to perform on either side.

**Perching on Stuff** – Get some sturdy boxes, plastic bins, etc, and turn them upside down. Reward your dog for any interaction, such as placing a paw on top of the box/bin; jumping on top of the box; standing on the box; sitting on the box, etc.

**Climbing in Stuff** – Now do the opposite. Turn the boxes/bins right side up and encourage your dog to climb in the box or bin.

Place several boxes in a line and lure your dog to step through the boxes.

**Ladders** – Lay a ladder on the ground and lure your dog to step through the rungs. Start with a walk and see if you can work up to a trot.

**Moving items** – Skateboards, children's small wagons, etc, are wonderful ways to teach your dog that putting their feet on moving items is not scary. This will help when they start learning the agility seesaw. Start with encouraging your dog to just look at the item; then place one foot on it; and try to build up over time until your dog can stand on the skateboard.

# *practice* AT HOME

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You can create some homemade agility obstacles for practicing at home. Here are some ideas to get you started:

**Tunnels** - Place a blanket over two chairs spaced apart and teach your dog to run between the chairs and under the blanket. You can also obtain a large cardboard box from an appliance store and remove both ends to create a tunnel.

**Jumps** – You can place a broomstick or some other pole between two chairs or perch the pole on two flower pots, etc, to create a jump. Keep jumps low in the training phase and make sure not to practice on a slick surface. Make sure the jump pole you are using will fall down if your dog hits it. You do not want your dog to fall over it.

**Weave poles** – You can use a row of toilet plungers in the house or a row of tomato stakes or something similar stuck in the ground outside as weave poles. Make sure they are spaced 24-inches apart and that the dog only enters with the first “pole” to its left.



*chapter three*

READY TO TRY YOUR  
HAND—AND PAW—  
IN COMPETITION?



# *levels of* COMPETITION

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## NOVICE

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For the dog just starting in agility. There are 14 to 16 obstacles on this course. The focus in the Novice class is on performing the obstacles with minimal handling technique.

## OPEN

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For the dog that has completed the Novice level. There are 16 to 18 obstacles on this course. The focus in the Open class is on more difficult obstacle-course performance, with more handling skill required.

## EXCELLENT/MASTER

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For the dog that has completed the Open level. There are 18 to 20 obstacles on this course. The object of the Excellent and Master level classes is to provide the opportunity for dogs and handlers to demonstrate their superior skills in moving quickly and efficiently with close communication and teamwork through challenging courses. The Master level is where your dog can earn the Master Agility Champion (MACH) title or the Preferred Agility Champion title.

# SCORING

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Agility is a time and fault sport in which the qualifying requirements are more challenging as the competition class levels get higher. There are two types of faults: time and course faults. Time faults are given for every second a dog goes over the Standard Course Time as set by the length of the course.

Below are examples of Course Faults that a judge may assess a handler and dog:

- Taking an obstacle out of sequence
- Missing a contact zone
- Displacing a bar or panel on a jump
- Jumping off the pause table before the judge is through counting
- Running around or refusing the next obstacle
- Touching either the dog or any obstacle by the handler while running the course

# *what to know before* ENTERING A COMPETITION

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## AM I ELIGIBLE?

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To be eligible to compete in agility trials:

- Make sure your dog has one of the following AKC numbers:
  - *AKC registration number* (purebred dogs)
  - *PAL/ILP number* (purebred dogs not eligible for standard AKC registration)
  - *AKC Canine Partners number* (mixed-breeds)
  
- Your dog must be up to date on all vaccines
  
- Your dog must be 15 months or older
  
- Dogs listed with the Canine Partners and PAL/ILP must be spayed or neutered



# *what to know before* ENTERING A COMPETITION

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## WHAT'S YOUR CLASS?

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The classes are divided by jump heights in order to make the competition equal between the different sizes of dogs.

## REGULAR CLASS

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8" Class – dogs up to 11" at the withers

12" Class – dogs over 11" and up to 14" at the withers

16" Class – dogs over 14" and up to 18" at the withers

20" Class – dogs over 18" and up to 22" at the withers

24" Class – dogs over 22" at the withers

26" Class – dogs may be entered at this height at their owner's discretion.

A dog may jump in a jump height class higher than his/her wither measurement, but never lower.

## PREFERRED CLASS

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This class affords an opportunity for a greater variety of dogs, and their handlers, to participate in the sport of agility. Handlers have the option to enter the Preferred classes with lower jump heights and an additional 5 seconds to complete the course.

*where to find a*  
CLUB AND TRIALS

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*Please visit*

*<http://www.akc.org/events/agility/>*

*to find clubs and trials near you.*



Amy Johnson/Great Dane Photos/©AKC



# *glossary of* AGILITY TERMS

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**Agility handling terms** - “Front cross”, “cross behind” and “blind cross” **refer** to the method the handler uses to change their position to aid the dog in negotiating the agility course.

**Faults** – Penalties assessed by the judge when a dog or handler does not perform the obstacle correctly.

**Leg** – A term that is frequently used for a qualifying score.

**Refusals/Runouts** – A type of fault given when the dog refuses to take the obstacle as they approach it or they run past the obstacle instead of performing it.

**Standard Course time** – Judge measures the agility course with a surveyor’s wheel and determines the standard course time that will be allotted for the course. Each day the courses are different for each class and level of competition.

**Walk-through** – Handlers are permitted to walk the course, without a dog, prior to the start of the class to plan their strategy.

**Wrong course** – Type of fault given when the dog does not take the next agility obstacle in correct sequence.

**Withers** - The top of a dog’s shoulder blades.



*chapter four*  
**FUR-REAL LIFE**



## *a dog named* ROO!

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One of the most famous agility dogs in the Canine Partners program is Roo!, a former shelter dog who won first place in the 24-inch jump height divisions at the 2012 AKC Agility Invitational and 2014 AKC National Agility Championship. Roo! was turned in to a shelter after she was found wandering around a park in San Francisco. Roo's owner, Stacey Campbell, is a trainer for the San Francisco SPCA and first met Roo at the shelter. Read about their journey here.

### **Roo's owner said:**

"I had been looking for a new dog to train for competition obedience for several months, and little did I know that a boisterous, big-eared mixed-breed would steal my heart! As I watched Roo! walk out of the shelter for the second time, I wondered if she was 'the dog that got away.' Fortunately for me, her second adopters found her a bit too mischievous and returned Roo! to the shelter three weeks later. At the time, she was an out-of-control, untrained adolescent dog with an endless supply of energy, and for the first six months we focused on basic house manners and learning how to redirect her enthusiasm for life. Soon we started to train for competition obedience, and Roo! breezed through her Companion Dog (CD) title, and quickly earned her first two Companion Dog Excellent (CDX) legs. While we were training for Obedience, we started agility as something fun to do together, and Roo! loved it. She loves to run and climb, and my light, leggy dog is a natural-born jumper; it seemed like the perfect sport for her. It's been an exhilarating journey, and I am so lucky to share these adventures with my wonderfully naughty girl!"

# THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB

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*The AKC is a not-for-profit organization and the largest purebred dog registry in the world. We are the sports-governing body for over 22,000 dog events a year, including conformation (dog shows) and exciting sports like agility, obedience, rally, tracking, lure coursing, earthdog, herding trials, among others.*

*But the AKC is so much more. Here are just some of the ways we support and enrich the lives of dogs—purebreds and mixed-breeds alike—and their families.*

[AKC Humane Fund](#), supports breed rescue activities, assists shelters that permit domestic-abuse victims to bring their pets, and educates dog lovers about responsible dog ownership.

[Canine Good Citizen®](#) program : A 10-step test that certifies dogs who have good manners at home and in their community. Over 600,000 dogs across the United States have become Canine Good Citizens , and 42 states have passed resolutions recognizing the program's merit and importance.

[AKC Reunite](#) has brought more than 400,000 lost pets back together with their owners.

The [AKC Canine Health Foundation](#), funds research projects and clinical studies. Since 1995 the AKC has donated over \$24 million to the CHF. (The AKC is the only registry that incorporates health-screening results into its permanent dog records.)

[AKC](#) conducts thousands of kennel inspections annually to monitor care and conditions at kennels across the country and ensure the integrity of the AKC registry.

We offer the largest, most comprehensive set of DNA programs for parentage verification and genetic identity to ensure reliable registration records.

AKC supports one of the world's largest collections of dog-related fine art and artifacts at the [AKC Museum of the Dog](#),

We have the world's largest [dog library](#) at AKC headquarters in New York, both of which are open to the public.

# THANK YOU FOR READING

We hope this information was valuable to you in helping your puppy live a long, healthy, happy life. Below, find additional books in our Owner's Manual series designed to strengthen the bond between you and your furry family member.



5 TRICKS TO SHOW OFF



AGILITY FOR BEGINNERS



CANINE BODY LANGUAGE



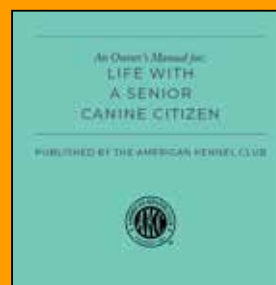
CANINE GOOD CITIZEN



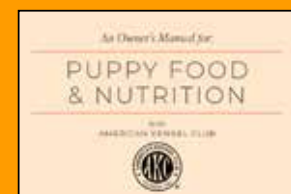
FIRST AID FOR DOGS



HOW TO CRATE TRAIN YOUR DOG



LIFE WITH A SENIOR DOG



PUPPY NUTRITION



SELECTING A PUPPY



5 BASIC COMMANDS



RESPONSIBLE DOG OWNER TIPS



WHY DOES MY DOG DO THAT?



WHAT'S HE THINKING?



PUPPY SOCIALIZATION