

Welcome to Dog Scouts of America's Winter of Wags 2021



Over the next four weeks we'll be providing you with a link to an activity guide and instruction on how to teach your dog new skills that will exercising his mind and body, build the human-canine bond and build confidence by applying learned behaviors in fun new ways. Just as you expect your dog to move out of his comfort zone as he learns new things, we hope you'll also use these next four weeks to try something new - you just may find your dog's new favorite activity! While our activities are based on the DSA merit badges, we hope your main focus will be to improve your dog's quality of life by teaching him skills that enable him to be a useful family and community member as well as a fabulous companion. There is often much more fluency and enjoyment to be gained if you step beyond the skills acknowledged through the merit badge program.

The activity guide will have embedded links that will take you to the instructions for teaching your dog new skills, playing the games and completing the enrichment activities. The website will also have additional informational and instruction links.

Once you've made an initial review of the activity guide and decided which activities you are interested in, check out the materials list and gather everything you need (feel free to improvise if you can think of a good substitute for an item you don't have on hand).

Write the training step you want to work on next on your training journal. Be specific— know your criteria – what will earn your dog the next treat? Will any version of a behavior suffice or are you looking for something specific – stick to that criteria during your training session (be conscious of what you're rewarding).

By the end of week one, you will need to e-mail us (events@dogscouts.org) a photo of you with your dog(s) so we can include you in the digital participation book. This photo may be a selfie/timed photo, or you may have a helper take it. If you are not joining the closed Facebook group created for this event: www.facebook.com/groups/winterofwags2021/ then please e-mail any questions you would like to be considered for the participation book to events@dogscouts.org

Following are some additional items we want to share that weren't included in the confirmation e-mail you received after registering.

Under the **Great Outdoors** category, we will be highlighting a different pulling sport as well as encourage you to step outside and take advantage of the stress relief that can come from some quiet time connected to the natural world. If you can expose a little skin to sunlight during the warmest part of the day for about 20-30 minutes three times a week, you'll be giving yourself a much needed vitamin D boost, which will keep away the winter blues and boost your immune system.

If some of the **Skills to Teach** are already known to your dog, try adding a new cue (hand signal or verbal) or work in a location that's new to your dog, or practice around items that your dog finds desirable – use those items as a reward when the requested behaviors are performed. Remember, if you get 3 incorrect

responses in a row, stop and re-evaluate. Are you too close to a distractor, is the environment too stimulating and your dog cannot focus, is your dog physically able to complete the requested behavior at that particular time, or is the anticipated reward not sufficient to motivate your dog to comply? Keep notes on your **training journal** so you'll have more information for future training sessions and know when to proceed to the next step. Use a portion of your dog's kibble as treats for rewarding known behaviors in comfortable environments and save the high-value rewards for when you're in more distracting environments or teaching new behaviors.

As you know, Dog Scouts of America promotes **Responsible Pet Parenting**. We encourage you to work through the activities provided which are based on our First Aid, Travel Safety and Disaster Preparedness badges. We understand there are many interactions your dog needs to be comfortable with without the stress of pain and fear. Working on these interactions before an emergency occurs is essential to ensuring the best possible outcome should the unthinkable happen. In an emergency, having your dog already comfortable with behaviors and interactions could save his life, and gaining muscle memory through practice on your part will help reduce potential stress/panic at having to responding to a situation, practice is the best way to prevent your knowledge being assigned to the archived section of your memory which often is difficult to access!

We'll send you an e-mail invite via runsignup.com for each Weekly Wag sessions and the two Badge Labs – at the advertised time, click on the link provided to enter the Zoom meeting. Don't worry if you haven't used Zoom before, we will include a link to a tutorial in that e-mail. During the meeting you will be provided with a link to download your attendance stamp for your Winter of Wags 2021 Passport. Your Passport is a little keepsake of some of the activities you'll complete during the next four weeks. We will send you the instructions on how to make it and then you can fill it with the stamps you'll collect by participating in various activities.

We're looking forward to sharing the next four weeks with you.

Lonnie, Melissa, Sally & Shirley