

## Evaluation criteria for the K-9 Fitness badge:

The overall goal of this badge is to show that the dog and handler have worked together to increase and maintain the health and fitness level of the dog (if the handler also increases their health and fitness, that's a good thing too!). Many Dog Scouts enjoy participating in a wide variety of activities and sports, but many of these activities can be physically demanding, especially to a dog who is not properly conditioned or may be overweight. To improve the dog's safety, reduce the risk of injury, and maximize enjoyment of these activities, handlers are encouraged to properly condition their dogs in preparation for these sports.

This badge is also about increasing the bond between the dog and the human(s) he or she lives with. For this reason, only exercise that is considered "interactive exercise" and/or "team building" can be used to meet the criteria for this badge. To determine if an exercise qualifies for the log sheet, it should also be described as **aerobic/cardio\*\* exercise for the dog that the dog performs safely and that the dog and handler are participating in together, meaning the dog needs some participation from the human.** Examples would be: fetching a ball/frisbee, safely running next to a bike or golf cart, pulling a cart or sulky at a trot, skijoring, herding, treibball, jogging, etc. Things that don't qualify are activities that encourage the dog to exercise without the interaction of the human family member(s) such as going to the dog park or turning the dog out in the yard or play time the dog has with other canine housemates.

**\*\*Aerobic/cardio exercise** means the activity gets the dog's heart rate and respiration to rise while performing the exercise. Exercises that are performed only in short intervals, with the dog resting and resuming a normal heart rate in between repetitions, do not meet the criteria. Short breaks to cool off or drink water are allowable, but not if the dog is resting for a long enough interval to return to a resting heart rate and respiration.

Due to the importance of duration in building fitness, there are many popular activities that may not count towards the exercise requirement, as they are typically performed in short intervals at a sprint effort. Sports such as agility, flyball, and lure coursing are great ways for a fit dog and his/her handler to be active and have fun, but they are not an ideal way to lose weight and build endurance. These activities usually involve great bursts of speed and strength, but may only last for a few seconds at a time. We encourage handlers to ensure that their dog is fit prior to starting these types of sports, and to continue a regular exercise program to maintain fitness and a healthy weight. This is especially important when the activity involves a great deal of impact to the dog's joints.

If the dog and handler pause during an exercise session, but the activity is resumed shortly, that is allowable. However, if the exercise is done in a series of short repetitions with rest time in between, it should not be logged. For example, when the dog and handler run an agility sequence in a group class, that activity is likely to only last less than two minutes, and then the dog is able to rest for several minutes while other classmates take their turn. This type of activity would not be considered aerobic.

Some sports may vary depending on how they are performed. For example, a handler may practice dock diving with their dog for an extended session, where the dog is fairly continuously jumping off the dock, swimming to shore, returning the bumper to the handler, and getting ready for the next throw. The dog is moving and keeping their heart rate up for the entire time. Dock diving at a competition, however, usually involves a dive or two followed by extended rest, so would not meet criteria.

In addition to the information discussed above and in the training materials and on the log sheet, here are a few other criteria that need to be met to qualify for the badge:

The activities used for this badge and demonstrated to the evaluator should be activities that are normally performed on a regular basis with the dog (at least once a week) to maintain their fitness level. Over the course of the eight weeks, there may be activities that the dog only has opportunity to perform on a limited, or even one-time basis, such as swimming if the dog and handler rarely get access to

swimming depth water. This activity may still be logged towards the overall exercise total, but the handler should be able to explain that the dog was appropriately conditioned for this type of new activity and that it was performed safely. For the purpose of check-off, demonstrations and videos should show the dog at least participating in the activities that are the most regular parts of their fitness regimen.

If the activity is done regularly during certain seasons, the handler should describe (and demonstrate if possible) the activities done with the dog during the “off-season” to maintain that dog’s fitness. Video examples count even if the majority of the evaluation is done in person.

If exercise is done on leash, the dog should not be pulling excessively or dragging the handler. Heeling is not necessary. If pulling is part of the exercise, the leash or attachment should be on a properly fitted V-front harness, not the dog’s collar.

### **Dog Requirements**

Dog must be a healthy weight, meaning that the ribs are easily palpable and the waist is visible. The owner may use this badge information as a way to get an overweight dog to this goal, but the dog needs to reach the goal to earn the badge.

The evaluator should be able to see or feel solid muscles on the dog. It should be clear that the dog has been exercising regularly, not just long enough to get the badge. The dog should be able to maintain aerobic activity for a reasonable amount of time without struggling to catch it’s breath as though it is new to aerobic activity.

Dog must log a minimum of 2.5 hours of aerobic/cardio exercise every week for at least six out of eight consecutive weeks. Exercise must take place on at least three days of every week with at least 1 rest day each week. In order to be logged, the exercise must involve at least 15 minutes of continuous aerobic exercise. Warm up and cool down time may be logged as well, but do not count towards the exercise time requirement.

Dog must demonstrate a willing performance of the exercise or exercises used on the log sheet, and should not be creating a disruption, endangering himself or others or violating any leash rules/laws. Ideally, it should be clear that the dog enjoys the activity and/or gets excited when the activity is going to start!

Dog must demonstrate two active stretching behaviors as described in the training materials, such as weaving between legs, bowing, putting feet up to stretch, high waving, etc. Dog must perform these behaviors on cue without rewards visible or on the person working with the dog.

Dog must demonstrate at least one strengthening exercise as described in the training information such as performing cues while on an exercise ball, wobble board or balance discs, maintaining balance while standing on 2 legs (front, sides or rear) or properly and safely doing weight pull activities. Rewards (not bribes or lures) may be used during these activities. Target objects may be used as long as the target object is not also the reward.

Dog must demonstrate one body awareness exercise, such as walking willingly through cavaletti or a ladder, pivoting rear end with front feet on a perch, lifting back feet on cue, seeking and touching a target with his back feet, etc. Dog must perform these willingly and on cue. The dog may be lifted and placed on an exercise ball, but should not show signs of apprehension once on the moving object. Rewards (not bribes or lures) may be used during these activities. Target objects may be used as long as the target object is not also the reward.

Dog will accept handling for massage and passive stretching as described in the training information, and will allow inspection of paws, pads, and gums.

### **Owner Requirements**

Owner can develop a safe and appropriate plan for increasing or maintaining the dog's fitness and can train the dog to perform the activity correctly and safely using only positive reinforcement methods.

Owner should be obeying any rules on use of an area with dogs, and insuring that the dog is not creating a disruption or danger while exercising.

Owner should be able to describe signs of overheating and emergency treatment, demonstrate that they attend to dog's hydration and nutrition needs, and should demonstrate/explain their warm-up and cool-down routines.

### **Equipment Needed**

Varies according to type of exercise. Equipment must be deemed safe and appropriate for the type of exercise. Possible examples of equipment used could include waist leash for running, bicycle and canine attachment, ball, Frisbee or bumper, exercise balls or discs, ladders, cavaletti, etc.

### **Not Allowable**

Unsafe performance of any exercise or behavior.

Violating leash or area use rules while exercising.

Forcing the dog to participate in exercise and/or stretching/strengthening routines.

Using aversive methods to teach behaviors or maintain exercise.

Using any equipment that causes pain or discomfort to the dog.

Using lures or bribes to get the dog to perform the desired behavior.

Dog looks stressed or fearful while performing any behavior for the badge.

Only exercising enough to get the badge- no intention of maintaining regular exercise.