



3 WAYS TO INCREASE THE DIFFICULTY

A Cone-Work Progression Guide for High-Energy Dogs





METHOD 1 Raise the Cones

What to Do

Flip the cones upside down and balance a broomstick or PVC pipe across the top of two cones. Your dog now has to step over the bar instead of just walking between the cones. Start low (just an inch off the ground) and gradually raise it higher.

Why It Works

This adds a height element that forces your dog to lift their paws deliberately and calculate their stride length. It builds front-end awareness, shoulder stability, and teaches them to slow down and think before committing to a movement. High energy dogs tend to blast through obstacles, this makes them pause, measure, and move with intention.

PRO TIP: If your dog tries to go around instead of over, place the cones against a wall or use a hallway to block the escape route. Reward the moment they even look at the bar.

METHOD 2 Stagger the Cones (Zig-Zag Weave)

What to Do

Instead of a straight line, place the cones in a zig-zag pattern. Your dog now has to weave their front end through first, but their back end will want to swing wide.

Why It Works

This forces your dog to control their front and back end separately, a skill called “proprioception.” When a dog's brain has to process where all four feet are in space, it burns more mental energy than straight-line movement.

"You won't ever wear them out through exercise, they will outlast you every time. What you need to do is challenge their minds, make them think, and preferably work and think simultaneously."

PRO TIP: Start with a slight stagger—just a few inches off-center. Once they nail it, increase the stagger until it looks like a true slalom.

METHOD 3 Add a Pause or “Hold” at the End

What to Do

Place a target (a mat, a paper plate, or even your foot) at the end of the cone line. When your dog exits the cones, ask them to pause with both front paws on the target before releasing them for a reward.

Why It Works

This adds an impulse control layer to the physical challenge. Dogs with high energy often move faster than their brain can plan—they knock bars, take equipment sloppily, and rush mechanics. Teaching them to pause and



process after a physically challenging task builds the mental skill of “patience in the details.” It's not about suppressing their enthusiasm, it's about teaching them to move with intention.

PRO TIP: Use a “wait” or “stay” cue. Start with just 1 second of pause, then gradually increase to 3–5 seconds. Mark and reward the moment they hold still.

Bonus: The Progression Ladder

Level	Setup	Goal
1	Wide straight line	Dog walks through without bumping
2	Narrow straight line	Dog side-steps through, back feet shuffle
3	Raised bar (low)	Dog steps over without knocking it
4	Raised bar (higher)	Dog lifts paws deliberately
5	Staggered weave	Dog weaves front and back end separately
6	Combine weave + raised bar	Ultimate challenge
7	Add pause at exit	Dog holds still after completing the sequence

Why This Matters

High-energy dogs aren't just hyper, they are often disconnected from their bodies. This exercise rewires their brain, prevents injuries (particularly to the shoulder and stifle joints), and physically exhausts them faster than a long run.

"You can't achieve this by running them alongside the car or by endlessly throwing a ball. You have to set challenges for them to solve."