

Gayle Watkins: Hi, this is Doctor Gayle Watkins from Avidog, where we teach dog breeders and puppy owners to raise fabulous dogs. In this video we're going to talk about taglines, one of the simplest, least expensive, and most effective training tools we can use to teach our pups good manners.

So what is a tagline? Taglines are light lines that are appropriate to the puppy's size. Thus, a very tiny puppy may wear a 2 to 3-foot tagline inside, and a 6 foot one outside while a giant breed puppy's tagline might be 5 feet long inside and 15 to 20 feet outside. What are the key components to a tagline? Well, it's a lightweight cord or line, and a clip relative to the puppy's size. There's no handle, knots, or anything else on the line to get caught on anything. The puppy wears its tagline nearly all of the time it's out of the crate or ex-pen, both in the house and outside. We call it our puppy's "bling". We put it on before the puppy comes out of its crate and we take it off when it goes back in. You might know taglines by another name, such as a drag, a house, or a longline, but what makes our taglines different from those things isn't how they look, but how they're used.

So what are taglines for? We use them to gently encourage our pups to do the right thing without us telling them what to do. This is different than the current fad called "manding", where a puppy sits every time they want something for you. For pups to behave while manding, there has to be a person present so the pup can request something of it. The goal of taglines is that the pup eventually does the right thing even if there isn't a person present.

How do taglines work? When pups are first born, they seek physical pressure from their mom and their littermates, but this changes as they grow and develop. By six weeks of age, pups resist physical pressure, often quite vigorously. Why does this change happen? Who the heck knows? Trainers and scientists talk a lot about it. Some call it the opposition reflex, others call it the freedom reflex. The problem with these terms is the response to pressure really isn't reflexive; it's not a reflex. Reflexes are automatic responses to stimuli that are performed without conscious thought. Initially the pup's response may be subconscious, but within a short period of time they can control it. A more appropriate term may come from science: thigmotaxis, which is the motion or orientation of an organism in response to touch. Positive

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thigmotaxis is when an animal moves towards touch, like newborn puppies. Negative thigmotaxis is when an animal moves away from physical contact. But regardless of what it's called, it happens in pups by six weeks of age.

At that age, pups resist collar pressure. If you pull on a puppy's leash, it will naturally pull in the opposite direction. So if you pull your pup towards you, he'll pull back; if you're behind him and you pull backwards, he'll pull forward. If you pull down on the leash, he'll pull up, and if you pull up on the leash he'll pull down. We can see this when we try to teach puppies not to do something. If your pup jumps on the counter, like this one, and you push him down, he'll usually jump right back up again. If you push a puppy down when he jumps up at you, he'll jump again. And if you shove a puppy out of a dishwasher, he's likely to go right back in there again.

These attempts at teaching our puppies not to do something is further complicated by the fact that our touch is often a reward for a puppy. So if we shove him down or pick him up to stop him, we may be unintentionally rewarding him for the very thing we're trying to stop. Let's take a look at what this looks like. Here is Cody, a young Australian shepherd puppy, who's exploring a place he's never been before. While he's exploring, he climbs on everything. He's up on tables, here he goes again. His owner is trying to tell him to stop. Now he ends up on the couch and while he's up there he starts exploring and he discovers some yummy treats. He tries to get more, and the people are trying to tell him that they don't want him to do it, but he just isn't getting it. They may be pushing him off the table and away from the treats, but he isn't realizing that they really don't want him climbing up there. They're saying no, stop, off, but it's not having any effect on Cody whatsoever. Nothing that Cody's doing makes him a bad puppy. In fact, he's a terrific, confident, happy little guy. He's a normal puppy that doesn't have any manners, and the people he's with don't know how to help him learn them. If this goes on, the people are likely to get more and more frustrated, eventually getting too physical or even angry with Cody.

Rather than pushing and shoving, using taglines are a better option. They naturally encourage the right behaviors so we can reward our pup. They don't involve touching the puppy, so we don't unintentionally reward the wrong behaviors, and they don't involve a command or cue so eventually we don't need to be present for the puppy to do the right thing. In addition, taglines improve our pup's self-control and teach puppies to give in rather than resist collar pressure, which makes walking them on leash a whole lot easier.

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So what kind of things are taglines good for? They're good for the most common puppy problems, such as jumping on people, biting or nipping, grabbing pant legs, shoes and shoelaces, stealing things, and chewing on things that they shouldn't. How do you use a tagline? First, remember that your pup should have the tagline attached to his collar whenever he's out of the crate or ex-pen, since you're always supervising your pup when he's out. Aren't you? That means you're also supervising your puppy when he has his tagline on. When you see your puppy do something wrong, like Cody jumping on the table, calmly and quietly and silently reach down and pick up the tagline. Don't say anything; no "no", "off", or "leave it". Just be quiet. Then gently but firmly pull up on the line until you have control over your pup's head, and he stops what he's doing. Hold that pressure until the pup stops jumping, biting, et cetera. If he's jumped up, you can slowly let him drop onto all fours. Once he's stopped the problem behavior, immediately release the pressure on the line but hang onto it; you're probably going to need it again. You can quietly praise him. Personally, I don't give a treat at this point although some trainers and owners do.

Now this next step is really important: let your puppy try again. This time, hopefully doing the right thing. If he's successful, praise him again and if you want this time you can give him a treat. But if he doesn't get it right this next time, which is super common, just put gentle upward pressure on the tagline again; release it when he stops the problem behavior. Repeat as needed. How many times might you need to repeat this sequence? Well, I always ask parents how many times do you have to tell a child not to touch a breakable item; many, many, *many* times. But since your pup is wearing his tagline all the time, it's easy to be calm and consistent. He'll get it eventually, I promise.

Let's take a look at some tagline training sessions. This first session is with Lise, one of Avidog's founders and an excellent dog trainer. She's teaching a 15-week-old Golden retriever puppy named Winnie not to jump up. The pup does a good job not jumping when she's sitting, but once she gets up and a little excited, she can't help herself and she jumps. This is really common in puppies. As soon as the puppy jumps up, you see the trainer use the tagline to put gentle, upward pressure. Winnie will get down. Now Lise has the opportunity to praise her and tell her how good she is for not jumping up. While you watch the video, note that Lise isn't giving her any command; she's not saying no, or off, or "eh". She's just letting the tagline assist the puppy in doing the right thing, and if you watch, it's really quick. That tagline is only tight for about one second and then it's released. So let's take a look.

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Lise is able to praise Winnie, because when she is stationary, she doesn't jump up. She's learned that when she's sitting, don't jump up. Now things are going to get a little more exciting. Tagline is dropped, and there we go. Now she gets cookies again for not jumping up. Lise lets her try again. And look at what a good girl she is. Now let's look at that in slow motion. Winnie gets excited, jumps. Lise puts upward pressure with the tagline. Winnie comes down, stops jumping, and Lise releases the pressure on the tagline. That's it.

Now mind you, this puppy isn't trained, and she'll jump again in the future. Why is that? Well, dogs don't generalize learning very well. They have to learn in many different situations with many people before they learn that they're never supposed to jump up. But this pup has learned her first lesson so will be in better shape to learn in the next session. Next, pups struggle to do the right thing when they're excited. So we first have to teach them in calm circumstances, in this case, Lise alone in the kitchen with Winnie. Then we let them get a little excited. You saw Lise playing with Winnie so she could learn not to jump up when she's excited, and then finally we let them get really excited in the real world and practice then. We know that they'll fail more so we calmly show them the right thing with the tagline.

Now let's look at a really common and challenging puppy behavior: biting. Puppy teeth are like razor blades and pups often don't know how much they hurt us. Some pups care, some pups don't, but intentionally or not all pups can really hurt us. In this clip, Lise is teaching Winnie to use her mouth gently. You'll see moments when Winnie is being very gentle, but then she loses control and bites too hard. So watch Lise's response with the tagline. It's pretty quick, so look closely. Lise uses the tagline to communicate with and calm Winnie, but then she loosens the pressure and lets Winnie try again to use her mouth gently, even when she's excited. When you're a puppy, it is really hard not to bite when you're excited. Who knew that people were so fragile? The other thing you want to note is how upbeat Winnie stays throughout these training sessions. She makes mistakes but she doesn't get down or upset, she just keeps trying. Lise isn't yelling "ouch" or telling her "no", or turning her back on Winnie. Instead she's seamlessly communicating with her in a way that Winnie is understanding. So let's watch this training session now.

Lise and Winnie are playing. Lise is not stopping Winnie from putting her mouth on her because she wants her to learn to be gentle. There's a little bite, and response by Lise. Here it is again in slow motion; it's quick! Bite, tagline, release. Now Winnie gets to try again. Note Lise is not hiding her hands. She's letting Winnie practice. Good

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girl! A few tips from this session: number one, don't use a command or a cue for a behavior you never want to see again. So if you don't want your puppy biting the kids or jumping up on people, don't say "no" or "down" or "off" when it happens. By putting a cue into the mix, you take responsibility for the pup doing the right thing. For example, if your pup jumps up and you say "off", the only way for your puppy to succeed at "off" is to jump up first. The pup can then wait for you to tell him to get off. Until you do, he's free to jump. Instead, we want the puppy to think the environment puts pressure on the tagline. Now it isn't your job to tell him to get off. It's his job to stay on the ground where he'll get lots of praise and even some treats. Don't forget to reward your pup when he *doesn't* jump up, rather than waiting for him to get off.

Next, remember that practice is critical for puppies. They have to keep trying to understand what we want because, honestly, none of it is obvious to puppies. In fact, just watch puppies at play and you'll see that biting, jumping, chewing, and grabbing things to eat or play chase with are what is normal for puppies. What we want them to do isn't normal for them. However, they can learn it.

Finally, one of the greatest things about the tagline is how calmly you can communicate with your pup. I know it's hard to be calm when your puppy is biting you, putting wet paws all over your guest, biting or stealing your cell phone. When we're upset, excited, frustrated, or angry, it's really hard for pups to learn from us. So instead, use the tagline to stay calm, cool, and collected so your pup quickly grasps what you want.

Our last clip is me working an 8½ week old puppy named Rucker. Rucker is a very sweet, biddable boy so it takes very little to communicate with him with the tagline. Since he's so easy you'll see that I'm very gentle with the tagline. In this session, I'm working with him not to pull on or chew my hanging plant that you see behind me. You'll see him grab a leaf a few times and then change his mind after I use the tagline to help him understand that it's not a good idea. Let's watch.

So here he is, and the plant is right above him and he thinks, "let me grab it." There's a little pressure from the tagline, he grabs again, I put the tagline on again and tell him how good he is. He thinks about grabbing the leaf again and decides not to. Here we are in slow motion with the first grab. There's the tagline pressure. I release as soon as he lets go, tell him he's good, and he thinks about that leaf and decides against it. What a good boy.

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A few thoughts on Rucker that can help us use the tagline even better. He shows us how to tailor the amount and length of upward pressure based on our pup's temperament. Rucker is an easy guy, so he needs very little. He's also very thoughtful, so at one point I thought he was grabbing a leaf, but he wasn't. I think he was considering it and changed his mind, so I began to pull up on the tagline and stopped when he made the right decision. Good boy.

We can also use taglines outside to reinforce the manners we've taught indoors, like not to jump on people. You can try to use it to teach a pup to not eat gross stuff like deer poop, but that's going to take a lot more determination on your part.

Personally, I just look the other way or move on. You can see we use a much longer line outside; this puppy's is probably 20 feet long. If you need to give him some help, you're going to move steadily towards the middle or the end of the line. Don't run at your puppy or you're likely to cause him to run away from you, either out of fear or because he wants to play chase, which is a favorite game that puppies play.

Remember to be quiet with no commands or cues, and finally, patiently repeat the tagline pressure as many times as you need. Meeting people outside is very exciting for puppies and most need a lot of practice to get this one right everywhere with all people.

What are a couple things we need to avoid when using taglines? First, they should only be used with buckle collars. Don't use them with martingales or choke collars of any kind. Second, avoid forgetting to put the tagline on when you bring your puppy out of the crate or ex-pen. If the tagline isn't on and your puppy jumps on you, you're going to need to reach for his collar and now several things could happen. Some pups might get frightened when you reach for their collar. Others learn to keep away from you so you can't get to the collar. Finally, many pups learn to use those razor-sharp teeth on your hand. None of these are good for you or your pup, so remember to put that tagline on every time.

Remember to be silent when using the tagline, avoiding any commands or cues. This helps put the responsibility on your puppy for behaving correctly. Watch out for backchaining the incorrect behavior. This is when your pup thinks they have to do the wrong thing in order to get a cookie. If your pup jumps up, you use the tagline, and as soon as your pup gets off you give him a cookie. The puppy now thinks he has to jump up and tolerate the tagline pressure in order to get the treat. This often happens when puppies steal things, so if they steal a sock and you trade them for a treat they figure, hey to get a treat I have to go steal a sock. If instead you use the

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tagline and put the sock back on the floor, let them avoid it and not grab the sock and get a treat. Now you're rewarding the correct behavior: ignoring the sock, rather than the wrong behavior, which is grabbing a sock, stealing a sock, et cetera. Remember, this is a calm and emotionless training tool, so no yelling, jerking, or pulling your puppy up off the ground. Finally, keep your hands and arms below your shoulders when you put upward pressure on the tagline, especially if you have a large puppy, so you don't injure your back or your shoulders.

I also wanted to give a shoutout to breeders. You can start your puppies between six and seven weeks of age on short little taglines, between 3 and 4 inches long like this puppy is wearing. Attach them to the pup's collar when you're supervising them and let them drag each other around by the line. These sessions will let your puppies teach each other that collar pressure isn't worth resisting, thus setting your pups up for easy transitions to leash and collar training as well as walking nicely on leash.

Well I bet you're wondering at this point where can I get this amazing tool? Well you can get taglines from us at our website, www.avidog.com, or if you'd rather make your own you can buy a light leash and cut off the handle. So if you have a toy dog, you're going to get a ¼ inch leash. If you have a medium or a large breed, you're going to get a 3/8-inch leash, and if you have a giant breed puppy you might want to go to a ½ inch leash. Get a cheap one, nylon, and just cut the handle off and now you've got a tagline. Or, if you're really handy, you can make your own by getting a light cord from your local hardware or home improvement store and just attach a clip to it. Remember the only knot that's allowed is the one that attaches the clip. There's no knots or anything else, loops, anything like that that might get caught.

That's it for taglines. So these are a natural and gentle tool that encourage pups to do the right thing. They work for a wide array of normal puppy problems, like biting, jumping, stealing, chewing, and they work for all breeds and just about all owners. I'm sure that you are one of them. Thanks so much for listening! Now go ahead and get a tagline and start communicating calmly and clearly with your puppy. If you like this class, check out all of our other classes for puppy owners and dog breeders at Avidog University, www.avidog.com. Take care!