



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Puppy Raising Department

“Go to Bed” Game

This teaches your puppy to go to a designated spot, lie down and stay there until released. A mat/towel or dog bed is used which can eventually be placed in a convenient area in your home or office and moved around as needed. You should pick one mat or bed to use for initial training but later on the mat or bed can be exchanged for another. Only put the mat/bed down when you are actively training for now. The dog bed you are using for this exercise must be picked up after each session until your puppy is trained. The reason for this is so that your puppy is not being ignored when he *chooses* to ‘Go to Bed’; he must be rewarded every time in early training.

Do not put any kind of bedding in your puppy’s crate where he may chew on it and make himself ill.

It is preferable that you do this exercise off-leash so that there is no chance of you inhibiting or guiding your puppy with the leash. If you are in a setting where off-leash work is impractical (e.g. a club meeting) be sure to let the leash slide through your hand easily if your puppy goes toward the mat or bed; do not inhibit him from making the decision to ‘Go to Bed’! A Flexi extendable leash would work well for this or several ex-pens hooked together to make an enclosure would be ideal.

A verbal marker is to be used to mark the precise moment your puppy offers the behavior. The verbal marker is the word “Nice!” said quickly in a light, crisp tone.

Step 1

Start in a quiet, familiar environment. Having the mat/bed on a hard floor, or at least in a contrasting color, will make it easier for your puppy to distinguish, but isn’t absolutely necessary. Have the treats (your puppy’s regular kibble measured from his meal) ready.

Place yourself near the mat in such a way that your puppy will step onto the mat. He doesn’t have to put all of his feet on it. Even if he puts one foot on mark and treat (from now on we’ll just say mark, but of course that means treat too.) Try to move your body different ways, e.g. right shoulder to the mat then left shoulder to the mat, so that you are not always giving him the same cue. Do not point at the

mat or use your hands at all. At first it should be almost accidental that his feet land on the mat.

Repeat x 10 times

Give the reward with your puppy still on the mat, meaning move *to* your puppy after you mark so the pup receives the reward while still on the mat. You may even give him the food low on the mat to encourage a 'down' but don't say down and don't withhold the food; once you have marked you must give it to him quickly. (To get him off the mat in between trials, draw him away with your body, gently use the leash, or practice your Food Induced Recall.)

Step 2

Try to give less body language to guide him onto the mat; let him figure it out on his own but go back to maneuvering your body slightly if he is 'stuck'. Sometimes just your looking at the mat will be sufficient. Stay close to the mat to keep it easy for him but try from different angles around the mat. Now withhold the mark until he puts at least two of his feet on the mat.

Repeat x 5-10 times

Step 3

From different angles around the mat, but no more than a few inches away, repeat the above. Step in to treat after you mark so he is rewarded on the mat; however don't worry if he steps off the mat *after* the mark but *before* the treat. Start asking for all four paws on the mat before you mark. Your puppy may stare at you expectantly when he puts two paws on the mat but just wait. He will probably then shuffle around and somehow hit the mat with all his feet, mark it! If he doesn't get the idea draw him off gently with the leash and re-approach using your body to help him hit the mat with more feet. Reward your puppy multiple times (jackpot) while he is on the mat; this will give him a strong, positive association with the mat.

Do not guide the puppy onto the mat with the leash! This should be his choice: go on the mat and get the reward or don't go on the mat and don't get rewarded.

If your puppy is getting this quickly you only need do five reps of each step. At this point no body language should be coming from you, stay still and neutral until you mark.

Step 4

Move a couple of inches further back from the mat and repeat the above. Within several sessions you should be able to have your puppy go to his mat from several feet away. He may even be difficult to keep *off* the mat! Once you have the behavior consistently start naming it, the verbal cue will be, "Go to Bed". You know the behavior is sufficiently solid to add this verbal cue when you can confidently predict your puppy *is* going to go to the mat. Would you bet \$20 on it? Only add the verbal

cue “Go to Bed” when you are positive your puppy is about to move back to the mat.

Perhaps your puppy now wants to stay on the mat as he associates it with good things; perfect, as now you need to add the next sequence in the behavior - to stay on the mat. Do not say ‘stay’ or give a signal. You want the puppy to eventually go to his mat and stay on it on the one command. *For now we don't mind if your puppy stays in a sit, down or stand position, so long as he's on the mat.*

Step 5

Go back to being very close to the mat. Send your pup to the mat and instead of marking as soon as he hits it with all four paws, wait a second or two, then mark. If he stays on the mat after the treat, wait for a few seconds and mark again. You can do this several times; don't worry if he gets off the mat immediately after the treat. If he stays still on the mat after several marks and treats call him off the mat in a Food Induced Recall and start the sequence again. If your puppy got off the mat too soon and you didn't get chance to mark him for staying on it, ask for a much shorter ‘stay’ next time. Slowly increase the amount of time on the mat before you mark but make sure you are allowing your puppy to be successful and not asking too much at once. If he gets off the mat before you mark just send him again but ask for a shorter duration before the mark.

Step 6

Just as you did in the first steps start sending the puppy to his mat from different angles, then slowly start increasing the distance but now always insisting on him staying on the mat until you mark; if he gets off – no treat. Remember to only change one criteria at a time e.g. if you send him from further away from the mat go back to shorter duration stays before marking. If you move the mat to a new location you will have to back up several steps in the sequence to make it simpler for your puppy.

Step 7

Although initially it is not important what position your puppy holds on the mat we eventually want him to go to it and lie down on it until released. As you work on increasing the duration of the stay on the mat, your pup will most likely be sitting, which is good, but may offer a down, which is even better. The second he offers a movement that looks like the beginning of a down position, mark it. As you withhold the mark to increase the length of time for staying on the mat he might offer all kinds of behaviors; you will only reward for staying on the mat for an increasing number of seconds *or* offering the beginning of a down movement.

Step 8

You may be lucky and have a puppy that offered to lie down on the mat promptly, and with lots of reinforcement, now always lies down on the mat. Or you may have to *shape* lying down on the mat by marking first for a lowering of the head from a

sit, then a crouch, then for one elbow touching the mat and eventually working up to a full lying position. This is called '*shaping*' a behavior. Because your puppy wants that mark so badly he will try different positions but you will only reward the ones that start looking like a down. Gradually increase your demand for the position by withholding the mark for positions you previously rewarded and only rewarding movements that are more like lying down. If you practiced giving him the treat low, making him reach his head down for it on the mat, he will probably already be going into a relaxed down when he hits the mat.

Step 9

Now your puppy is going across the room to the mat, on your verbal cue, from any angle and lying down on it. He's holding the position for a length of time (with young puppies don't ask for unrealistic durations; a minute or two would be fine at this point). You can start practicing in different places and adding distractions but always make it easier, going back numerous steps, when introducing new distractions. You can also set the mat next to you while watching TV or working at your desk; occasionally rewarding your puppy for staying down on the mat.

Once your puppy understands the whole behavior sequence there is no reason to mark any longer as marking is only used when *teaching* a behavior. However, continue to give very occasional food rewards, and regular verbal praise, after longer durations of staying on the mat, throughout your puppy's raising.