



# Guide Dogs for the Blind

## Puppy Raising Department

### Paw Pad Game #4 - Down, Stand, Sit

(see video Paw Pad Game #4 link: )

#### Goal Behavior

The puppy will change positions, adopting sit, down or stand, with the front feet on the Paw Pad, when cued by a signal from the handler. The verbal cues for these foundation positions will be introduced once the puppy is reliably responding (fluent) to the signals. Duration (stay) will also be attained in all positions.

Note: The correct way to introduce verbal cues is explained in this document. If the raiser adds the verbal cues sooner, that is OK, but the puppy probably will not focus on the verbal cue due to the lure/signal “blocking” the verbal cue. Dogs respond much more easily to visual cues (signals) than verbal cues. The eventual goal is that the puppy responds to a verbal cue alone and no longer needs to be given a signal to attain a position. See the section below “Introduction of Verbal Cues for the Foundation Positions” for more details.

#### Prerequisites

- The puppy should be familiar with Paw Pad Game #3. The puppy should be comfortable maintaining a stand and sit position on the Paw Pad for at least ten seconds, between rewards, with the handler moving in and out of position.
- The puppy should be familiar with the down signal as in the document “Introducing the Foundation Position “Down”.
- Because all the signals - sit, stand and down will now be utilized raisers should be sure they are giving the correct hand signals as in this video link: <https://youtu.be/z2l-vhHG0Gw>

After introducing the down position to the puppy, the raiser should immediately utilize the Paw Pad. If the handler continues rewarding the puppy for lying down

somewhere in front of the handler, the pup will form a habit of swinging in front when asked to down. The previous work on Paw Pad games in “heel” position will now make it easy to transition the pup to downing at the handler’s side. Continuing to focus on Paw Pad games will reinforce heel position and will also make introduction of the “stay” cue very simple.

## Session Set up

- A suitable Paw Pad should be set up in a quiet area. At this time a shorter Paw Pad is recommended. *Too tall a pad will make it difficult for the puppy to sit and lie down comfortably.*
  - The training is preferably done off-leash in an area that is safe with no distractions. If the leash is attached, it should be loose and stepped upon so that the handler’s hands are free. The leash should not be used to guide the puppy.
  - The bait bag will be most accessible if worn in the small of the handler’s back; this allows for feeding with both hands.
  - Some puppies may still need a wall on the outside to help keep the pup straight. The pad should not be so close to the wall that the puppy leans on the wall.
  - The handler should stand facing forward with the Paw Pad on the left, positioned so that the front edge is approximately at the midline of the foot and touching or nearly touching the handler’s foot. This will place the puppy with its front legs level with the seam of the handler’s pants; the pup’s ears should be about level with the handler’s leg when on the pad, i.e. in “heel position.”
- ❖ **Reminders:** The *verbal* cue to down will be introduced later when the puppy is confidently responding to the signal. The difference between a lure and a signal is that a lure is hand-held food and a true signal is given with a hand motion that contains no food. The puppy should no longer need to be *lured* into sit and stand positions but should be given the *signal*, marked and rewarded. However, most pups will still need luring on the down as the criteria have been changed - now the pup is being asked to lie down with its front feet on the Paw Pad and at the handler’s side, rather than in front of the handler.

## Steps

### Down on the Paw Pad

- The puppy should be rewarded once for sitting on the Paw Pad.
- The handler should give the down signal with a piece of kibble held under the thumb, across the palm. Because we are asking the puppy to lie down in a different position in relation to the handler than when we introduced the down, the handler can go back to a signal/lure for the first couple of repetitions.



- Once the puppy lies down, it should be given several pieces of kibble in quick succession. It may be necessary for the handler to hold a stash of several kibbles in the left hand, held behind the handler's back, to reward the puppy without having to reach into the bait bag. Often, when first learning a position, the pup may not be able to hold still long enough for the handler to reach into the bag to obtain food.
- The pup should be asked to maintain the down position for five to ten seconds duration with continuous reinforcement. If duration is not heavily reinforced, the pup will constantly offer changes of position to earn rewards. It must learn to hold the position until cued to change position.
- The raiser should gradually increase the amount of time between rewards for maintaining the down position.
- The puppy that changes position without being cued to do so should not receive a reward for that behavior.

## *Troubleshooting*

- ✓ *If the puppy is reluctant to lie down, the height of the Paw Pad should be checked.*
- ✓ *It is difficult for puppies to be accurate about where they lie down in relation to the pad. So long as the pup is not curled in front of the handler and has a least part of one front leg on the pad, it should be rewarded. If the pup is badly out of position, it should not be rewarded and should be started again by removing it from the pad and walking around back onto the pad.*
- ✓ *If the puppy stands or sits up when the handler stands up straight after rewarding the puppy, the raiser must feed more quickly (which for most handlers necessitates a quick knee bend to get the food to the pup's mouth.) Not delivering food right to the puppy's mouth may cause the pup to sit up to reach the reward.*

## Changing Positions

- The puppy can be given the signal to sit (the handler may have to bend to get the signal level with the lying puppy's head), marked and rewarded. Ten to twenty seconds of duration (staying in that position) should be rewarded intermittently, and then the pup can be signal/lured back into a down.
- In the down position the puppy should be rewarded several times as before, with the handler standing up between feeding the puppy single kibble rewards from either hand.



- The puppy can be given the signal to stand, marked and rewarded. Ten to twenty seconds of duration (staying in the stand position) should be rewarded intermittently and then the pup can be signal/lured back into the down position.
- The changes of position can be made random with focus placed on the positions in which the puppy is weakest.

### The Importance of Rewarding Duration (Staying Still)

On all of foundation positions, stand, down and sit, the pup must be well reinforced for holding position (staying) to prevent the puppy from constantly moving/offering changes of position. The raiser should always give multiple rewards in one position before asking for a change of position. The rate of reinforcement (timing of rewards) is crucial - waiting too long between rewards when the pup is not ready for it, will result in unwanted movement. However, a continuous rate of reinforcement will not teach the puppy to wait for rewards; the time between rewards for maintaining the position must be gradually and thoughtfully increased.

Some puppies will be better at holding one position over another and rewards can be offered for that position more randomly. Puppies should be more heavily reinforced and practiced in the positions that are the most challenging for them. It is a balance to keep the puppy motivated to hold all positions!

It cannot be stressed enough how important duration is when playing these games with the puppy. The puppy not anticipating a position change puts the cue under stimulus control and is the first step in teaching stay in a positive manner.

### The Lure into Down Becomes an Actual Signal

- When the pup is readily responding to the lure into a down it is time to start weaning the puppy off the hand-held food. This should happen within ten to twenty sessions of the lure/signal being introduced for most puppies.
- To avoid confusing the puppy, care should be taken that the shape of the hand signal is exactly the same when transitioning from the lure/signal to a pure signal.
- After a couple of lure/signals to lie down, the handler should give the pup a signal for the position, mark as soon as the puppy responds and reward with a kibble held in the other hand. For the first few times the signal is given it is best to have food ready in the left hand, held behind the handler's back, to facilitate a quick reward. Otherwise, when the handler marks, the puppy might get up while the raiser is reaching for the food in the bait bag. This stash of

food in the non-signal hand is usually only necessary for the first few repetitions; subsequently the raiser can go to marking then reaching into the bag for reward.

- Sometimes it helps to alternate between luring and signaling when weaning off the hand-held lure. For example, the handler would lure five times then give a signal, being careful to keep the hand exactly the same shape whether food is held or not. Then the handler might lure three times then signal and so on.
- When the puppy responds to a signal, not a lure, it should be marked with “Nice!”

### *Troubleshooting*

- ✓ *If the puppy refuses to lie down without the hand-held kibble i.e. a lure, the handler should withhold food and turn their attention to the ceiling for five seconds (see “time outs” below) then try again. The puppy will see the time out as a lost opportunity to earn reward. The signal should be tried again and if the puppy still refuses, the handler should end the session. The next session should start with luring for ten repetitions before trying the signal again. When the puppy does go down on a signal, a jackpot (multiple pieces of food given at once) may be given.*

### More on Duration for Puppies Who Anticipate Position Changes

Once the pup is in the desired position, it should be fed single pieces of kibble from either hand to reward it for holding position. If the pup is either losing interest in the game, or attempts to change position before being cued, the food delivery should be sped up. It may be necessary to get the rewards to the pup really quickly at first, before it thinks about getting out of position. The raiser rummaging in the bait bag a split second too long may cause the pup to break position. At this point in the game, it’s acceptable for the raiser to hold a stash of food in one hand so that a kibble can quickly be given to the pup with either hand.

### Negative Punishment – Time Outs

Once the puppy has had many sessions of being positively reinforced for holding the cued position on the Paw Pad, negative punishment may be applied if the puppy changes position without being cued to do so. Negative punishment is withholding something that the puppy wants – in this case, food and handler attention. *Time outs will not work with puppies that do not have a history of positive reinforcement on the Paw Pad so cannot be applied earlier in the learning process.*

- If the puppy offers a position change without being cued to do so the handler should immediately turn away from the puppy and become very still and quiet, like a post. The time out should last five to ten seconds. If it is safe to do so, the handler can even walk a few steps away from the puppy and Paw Pad.
- When resuming the game, the handler should make sure the puppy is successful even if it means going back a few steps in the game.

### Duration - Three “Ds” or How to Positively Teach a Stay

Three elements need to be considered when teaching a pup to stay; only one element should be added at a time. When one element is increased in difficulty the other elements should be made easier:

- **Duration** - the amount of *time* that the puppy is asked to hold the position. This should be built up gradually. A few seconds is a long time for a baby puppy to hold a position!
- **Distraction** - this could mean handler movement or outside distractions. Handler movement should be worked on first. Initially this may mean just standing up from a crouch or a step to one side then quickly back to the pup to reward. Then perhaps a little jiggle in place ... If the pup moves the handler should start again and make it easier for the puppy. Other distractions (such as people, dogs, blowing leaves) should be very minor and a long way from the puppy to begin with. Distractions should be introduced carefully and slowly to allow the pup to be successful.
- **Distance** - When adding *distance* away from the puppy, the *time* the puppy is expected to maintain the position should be decreased. Distance between the pup and handler should be increased a half step at a time. If the puppy moves the handler needs to stay closer.

Adding too much difficulty at once would be unfair to the puppy, undermining its success and chance to earn positive reinforcement. Building up the stays slowly with lots of rewards will result in a happy, reliable puppy!

### Introducing the Verbal Cue to “Stay”

On the positions where the puppy has excellent duration i.e. the pup will hold position for at least twenty seconds between rewards and the handler can move six to ten feet away, the raiser can now start giving the verbal cue “stay” before leaving the puppy. The cue should be given quietly and matter-of-factly so as not to startle or confuse the puppy. The puppy may be ready for a stay cue after just a few weeks of work on a position, or it may take longer. Only when the raiser is really sure that the puppy will hold its position, should the stay cue be given.

- ❖ Note: It is advisable to leave the introduction of the *signal* for stay until much later, when the puppy is very fluent on verbal cues for position changes. Introducing the signal for stay at this point has the potential to be very confusing for the puppy as signals up to now have been associated with movement.

### Introduction of Verbal Cues for the Foundation Positions

Now verbal cues can be given just before the hand signal on the foundation positions the puppy is fluent in. When teaching a verbal cue, it is given *before* the signal, not at the same time. If the verbal cue is given at the same time as the signal, the puppy will not pay attention to the verbal cue as dogs are so much more aware of body language (signals), than the human speaking voice.

“Down” as an example:

- The handler says “down”, *and then* gives the signal to down; the puppy lies down, is marked and rewarded.
- After ten sessions of ten repetitions each of the above, the handler says “down” *without* giving a signal; the puppy will probably down and should be marked and rewarded.

The same procedure is followed for teaching verbal cues for “stand” and “sit”.

### *Troubleshooting*

- ✓ *If the puppy is not responding to the verbal cue after ten sessions of work on the verbal cue as outlined above, the puppy should be given another five sessions or so of the handler saying the cue before the hand signal.*
- ✓ *Should the puppy still not respond to the verbal cue without the signal, fading the signal is another option. Fading the signal means to very gradually reduce the signal by making it smaller and smaller until it is just a finger flick then nothing at all.*

If the puppy is having difficulty on any parts of this game and the handler is unsure of why or how to continue, the leader should be consulted. Sometimes an observer can see why breakdowns in behavior are happening more easily than the handler can. Our goal is to keep puppy training positive for pups and handlers alike!