



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Recognizing and Reporting Negative Behaviors in GDB Puppies

While raising a GDB puppy, raisers may encounter some behaviors that, though “normal” dog behavior, are inappropriate for a puppy being raised to be a guide. It is essential that inappropriate behaviors are reported to the puppy club leader in a timely manner as early intervention is key to changing these behaviors. The leader will determine how serious the behavior is and will consult with the CFR if necessary for a plan of action. Some inappropriate behaviors are common in growing puppies and just need to be worked through. Other behaviors are serious and, if not addressed quickly, may lead to eventual career change of the puppy.

Descriptions of Concerning Behaviors

Oral Behaviors

- **Mouthing** - Gently (though sometimes not so gently) taking a person’s hand or arm in the mouth. This is sometimes done while being groomed, handled, or in greeting. Many puppies use their mouths in communicating with people as they would with their littermates. This “mouthy” behavior is normal puppy behavior but must still be addressed. Puppies resisting handling are often mouthy.
- **Nibbling** - The puppy uses his front teeth to repeatedly take tiny bites as in flea biting.
- **Nipping** - Taking one or more small bites with the front teeth. This behavior may be exhibited when the pup is feeling playful, fearful or aggressive.
- **Grabbing** - Reaching out and taking hold of a piece of clothing, or body part, of a human, or of another animal.
- **Snapping** - Biting at a person, dog or object without making physical contact with the teeth. It may or may not be accompanied by some form of vocalization like growling or barking. Frequently the sound of the teeth closing rapidly can be heard.
- **Biting** - Quickly using his teeth in a forceful, unpleasant and hurtful way. Dog actually bites the object of focus defensively or offensively. Many bites either bruise or break the skin of the person or dog being bitten. Should a GDB puppy break skin on a handler, the incident should be reported to the leader and CFR immediately. A protocol is in place to ensure the proper reporting to county authorities etc.

Other Concerning Behaviors

- **Hackling** - The hairs along the back of the dog’s neck and back (sometimes top of the tail) stand on end, indicating an insecure, defensive or hostile

attitude towards a situation. Hackling can also just be an indication of over-excitement.

- **Posturing** - The dog stiffens the body, raising the neck, head and tail to their highest possible levels (sometimes accompanied by hackles). The dog gives intense, direct eye contact with the object of focus.
- **Growling** - A vocal warning from a dog.
- **Snarling** - Pulling the lips back to reveal the front teeth; often accompanied by growling.
- **Lunging** - The puppy moves rapidly toward another dog, person or object, often dragging its handler with it. This behavior is often not aggressive in intent, but is an indication that the puppy has not yet learned self-control.
- **Slinking** - The puppy walks with its rear end (or the whole body) lowered toward the ground. Usually the tail is clamped to the body or held between the legs.
- **Cowering** - An attempt to avoid a person, dog or thing by drawing away or hiding behind someone or thing.
- **Soliciting** - Excessive attention on people and desire to interact with people. May be coupled with excited greeting behavior.
- **Submissive/excited urinating** - The release of urine by a puppy when it is feeling anxious, fearful or attempting to show that it acknowledges the dominance of a person or another dog. This is a common behavior for many puppies that should not be acknowledged or punished in any way. Most frequently happens when greeting.
- **Keying** - The puppy stares intensely at something.
- **Balking** - The puppy refuses to move either on leash or unwilling to enter/exit a vehicle or building.
- **Alarm or Alert Barking** - In response to a noise/person/object; may be a soft "woof" or a series of barks.
- **Guarding/possessive behavior** - Can be over food/toys/water/space and toward people or other dogs. Early signs are stiffening/stillness; hunkering over object; white showing in the eye (whale eye); gobbling food more quickly; all upon approach of another dog or person. Later growling or snarling may occur.
- **Separation Anxiety** - Vocalizing, anxious behavior when left alone.

Descriptions of Inappropriate Attitudes

- **Insecurity** - An attitude characterized by anxiety, fear or lack of confidence. Insecure dogs or pups may sometimes exhibit defensive behavior because they are fearful and trying to drive away the thing that they fear. This particularly applies to their interactions with other dogs and may initially be seen as hackling, growling or barking.
- **Aggression** - Behavior that is usually characterized by intent to harm another dog or a person. The dog displays aggressive behaviors in either an offensive manner or a defensive manner (more common).
- **Assertiveness** - Puppy may act in a very confident, "pushy" manner and may

lack willingness.

- **Dominance** - An attitude characterized by the desire be in charge of other people or dogs.
- **Fearfulness** - An attitude characterized by strong anxiety and insecurity. Most fearful dogs or pups will exhibit trembling, whining, slinking, cowering or hackling at one time or another.
- **Submissiveness** - An attitude characterized by a desire to appease the individual or dog that they consider to be dominant or in charge. Submissive dogs or puppies may sometimes act in an insecure or fearful manner around certain types of people or other dogs.
- **Aloofness** - An aloof puppy is often independent and lacks responsiveness to secondary reinforcement (praise and petting).

Behaviors to Report to Leaders

- Nibbling, mouthing, nipping, grabbing, snapping, biting, hackling, posturing, lunging, resisting handling, mounting of people or objects, growling, whining barking (other than in play).
- Destructive chewing, picking up objects, ingesting objects, stealing food, foraging for food, jumping on counters and furniture, keep-away, charging through doors, possessive behaviors (in relation to food, toys, people, pets, space).
- Balking, slinking, cowering, car sickness/fear of riding, submissive or excited urinating, drooling not related to food use, lack of food interest.
- Soliciting people, jumping on people, scavenging, and distraction by small animals, distraction/obsession with or fear of dogs.
- Self-destructive chewing or licking of body parts, tail-chasing, chasing lights or shadows.

Although reporting of such behaviors on the monthly report is essential for the puppy's record, raisers are asked to communicate with their leader promptly should the puppy display concerning behaviors. Effective communication is an important part of raising a GDB puppy and can contribute to the puppy's future success in the program.