



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Relieving and Housebreaking

Goal Behavior

The puppy readily leash-relieves on cement or other hard surface when offered regularly scheduled opportunities and in response to the “Do Your Business” (DYB) cue. The puppy is prompt in its response to the cue, relieving in less than three minutes. The puppy will wait for an offered relieving opportunity and will not indiscriminately relieve on walks, outings or other socialization experiences. The puppy is comfortable with the handler physically close during relieving and is relieved in front of the raiser. The puppy does not relieve in the house, demonstrating self-control over urinating and defecating (waits for offered relieving). Although waiting for offered relieving times is ideal, indicating a necessity to relieve when in the home is preferable to having accidents. The puppy is able to walk briskly for at least 1 mile without the need to relieve.

Initial Training Session Objectives

Each puppy will progress at a different rate depending on its temperament and physical maturity. The puppy will learn to relieve on-leash at a predetermined relieving location. The goal is to have the puppy walk by the handler’s side to the relieving area in a controlled manner, then relieve on cue in front of the handler.

Note: The puppy jacket should always be removed before offering relieving. If the puppy does start to relieve while in jacket, the raiser need not remove the jacket at that point but should resolve to anticipate the pup’s needs in the future.

Prerequisites

Raisers should start these exercises as soon as the puppy comes home. Young puppies need frequent relieving opportunities and may initially need to be carried to the relieving location to prevent an accident in route.

Session Set Up

The raiser should choose a relieving area that can be used each time the puppy is taken outside. Using the familiar area acts as an additional cue to the puppy about what is expected and may help the puppy relieve more promptly.

- Ideally the relieving area should consist of a hard surface like concrete or asphalt. Puppies come from the kennel already familiar with relieving on cement; it is advantageous to keep up this habit as the puppy matures. If these substrates are not readily available, an area can be created using premade pavers found at most Home and Garden stores.
- Packed dirt or gravel can be substituted if absolutely necessary, understanding that the puppy must be relieved on concrete/hard top regularly to keep it comfortable with those surfaces.

First Steps

- The handler should take the puppy, on-leash, to the relieving area. Young puppies in a hurry may need, at first, to be carried to the relieving area.
- As the puppy reaches the relieving area, the handler gives the puppy a release cue of “OK” and casts the puppy out in front of the handler.
- The puppy should be allowed to sniff the ground and may be encouraged to move back and forth, or in a circular pattern, in front of the handler to promote relieving.
- The handler may pivot in the center if necessary, however, the handler should remain facing the pup as it circles, teaching the pup to relieve in front of the handler. Preventing a puppy from relieving on the handler’s left side may help it understand that it is not desirable to relieve in heel position.
- The handler should not follow the puppy if it attempts to move to fresh ground; this will encourage the puppy to explore instead of focusing on the task at hand
- A six-foot radius around the handler should be sufficient for the puppy to relieve in.
- If the puppy is reluctant to move, the handler may take several steps forward and backwards or side to side, while encouraging the puppy to keep moving and stay engaged in the activity.
- The moment the puppy begins to relieve, the handler should add the cue “Do Your Business” repeating as the puppy relieves. As the pup finishes relieving the handler may choose to mark the behavior and use a food reward as soon as the pup returns from the squat to a normal position.
- As the training progresses and the puppy starts to make an association with the cue, the handler can progress to giving the DYB cue as the puppy is cast out in front of the handler, (the cue initiates relieving) rather than saying and repeating the cue as the puppy is actually in the act of relieving.

Handling Tips

- The handler may need to repeat the “Do Your Business” cue to get the puppy back on track if at any time the pup becomes distracted or loses interest in the activity.
- Generally puppies that stop moving or sit down and “star gaze” are not likely to relieve without a leash prompt to keep moving.
- Sniffing is a preliminary behavior to relieving. Handlers should be careful to watch for scavenging in young puppies, however, it is permissible for the puppy to sniff the ground in preparation to relieve.
- Preventing the pup from sniffing may accidentally prevent the puppy from relieving.

Housebreaking (teaching the puppy not to relieve in the home)

Young puppies should be supervised at all times and crated when supervision is not practical. This allows the handler to watch for indications that the puppy needs to relieve and to take the puppy to the desired relieving location prior to an accident. It also allows the handler to interrupt the puppy should it start to relieve. Young puppies have small bladders and need to be offered the opportunity to relieve frequently.

Handlers should be alert to the puppy’s body language signaling that the puppy needs to relieve. This may include sniffing the floor, starting to circle intently, moving in a different manner or suddenly interrupting an activity. Barking and whining may also be indicators of the need to relieve, especially when crated.

Raisers should observe how often the puppy shows the desire to relieve and should take the puppy out on a schedule. During initial housebreaking, the puppy should also be taken out every time it signals, or indicates the need, to relieve.

If the puppy starts to relieve in the home the handler should quickly interrupt it with a startle sound such as a verbal “AY!” or a sharp clap of the hands. This is intended to interrupt the progress of the accident and to communicate to the puppy that relieving inside is not appropriate. Once interrupted, the puppy should immediately be taken to the designated spot to finish relieving. The DYB cue should be given and the puppy praised when finished.

If the puppy has had an accident in the home, the soiled area should be cleaned completely with a stain and odor remover solution such as Natures Miracle. This will eliminate any evidence of the accident and prevent the puppy from being drawn back to the area in the future.

Tips for success:

- The raiser should keep a log tracking the puppy’s natural patterns for relieving and how long the puppy can “hold it” between opportunities to relieve.
- Water intake may need to be monitored (not restricted) to set the puppy up for success. Raisers who have concerns about the volume of water their puppy is consuming, or concerns about changes in their puppy’s drinking or relieving patterns should bring this to the attention of their leader.
- An opportunity to relieve should be offered after the puppy’s last meal of the day and just prior to crating at bedtime; this will help insure the pup’s bladder and bowels are empty.

Note: GDB veterinarians recommended free access to water for GDB puppies. Limiting the supply of this essential nutrient can cause significant health concerns including life-threatening dehydration. This risk is especially concerning for younger puppies because their kidneys are not fully developed and functional until 4-5 months of age. Although free access to water is preferable, water may be offered on a schedule to younger puppies and those challenged with urination accidents. Offering the puppy as much water as it wants to drink, at least 8 times per day, will keep the puppy healthy.

Teaching the Puppy Not to Relieve Indiscriminately On Leash

As well as learning to relieve on command, the puppy also needs to learn to not relieve indiscriminately.

- Ideally the puppy should only be relieved at home, on-leash, in the same spot, according to its regular biological schedule.
- The process of teaching the puppy this concept starts by relieving the puppy only in the designated relieving spot and taking note of the puppy’s biological schedule.
- Initially limiting the number of designated relieving spots to one at home and one at work/school, if needed, can help diminish confusion in the puppy and set him up for success.
- Appropriate socialization outings should be planned based on the puppy’s age. Puppies should not be taken on an outing of a duration that necessitates relieving.

Outings should be planned so that the puppy can return to the designated spot at home to relieve.

- Puppies that accompany the raiser to work should have one designated relieving area at home and another designated area near the workplace.
- The puppy should always be fully relieved before setting out for a walk or socialization event. The raiser should never take a “loaded” puppy away from home! If the puppy does not relieve when given the opportunity offered, the walk/outing must be delayed until the pup has relieved or the puppy must stay home.
- Neighborhood walks should never be used as a relieving opportunity. Allowing a puppy to relieve on a walk (even if the jacket is removed) creates a negative pattern of relieving at will. This leads to confusion and relieving in harness.
- When introducing a puppy to stores and businesses, the puppy should be kept close to the entrance and only allowed in the store for a minute or so. This procedure should be followed for several weeks so that the puppy is never given the chance to relieve itself inside a store.
- As the pup matures and is able to control itself better, it can be taken inside the store/mall for longer periods but still shouldn't be taken far from an entrance.
- If the puppy does have an accident in a place of business, the handler should go back to one minute at the entrance and take time to build up the exposure again. Relieving habits form quickly and several accidents in the mall may take months of careful retraining. A general rule is that after a second accident in a particular place that place should be avoided for several months and then visited with caution, using slow introduction as above.
- *A relieving accident is defined as any time a puppy indicates a need to relieve without the handler first offering the opportunity to relieve.* Ideally this opportunity would be at a scheduled time in the regular relieving spot.

“Marking”

- To discourage marking behavior, handlers should always relieve adolescent male puppies away from vertical objects such as trees, bushes and the sides of buildings. Level areas without vertical objects should be chosen for relieving areas.
- Handlers should take care when walking hormonal male dogs to keep them away from vertical objects and areas where other dogs may have marked previously.
- Male pups will sometimes mark (release a small amount of urine) without lifting the leg and even sometimes while walking. Any urinating without a cue from the raiser is to be discouraged.

Accidents on Walks

It is vital that a GDB puppy learn to relieve on cue when offered an opportunity and also learn that it is not appropriate to relieve in the absence of the cue. An accident is defined as anytime a puppy makes an unplanned attempt to relieve without the DYB cue, regardless of whether the puppy is in a building/store or outside. This applies whether the puppy is in or out of jacket.

- The puppy should always be relieved at home prior to any walks or socialization outings. The puppy should be left at home if it refuses to relieve when given the opportunity in its regular relieving spot.

- Raisers should be aware of how an individual puppy indicates the desire to relieve. Some puppies slow down, balk or pull to the side.
- If the puppy indicates the desire to relieve on a walk or outing, the handler should verbally interrupt the pup and place it quickly into a sit for several minutes. This attempts to interrupt the urge to relieve and changes the puppy's focus. As the handler resumes the walk (heading for home or the car) it can often be helpful to focus on rewarding for loose leash walking, or other desirable behaviors, to help redirect the puppy's attention from relieving.
- Raisers should never follow up an indication from the puppy of a need to relieve by immediately moving several feet and providing an opportunity for the pup to relieve on cue.
- The puppy should be taken home, if possible, to complete relieving with the DYB cue in its regular relieving spot. Most puppies can hold themselves for the car ride home or at least to another designated relieving area. The time between the puppy indicating a desire to relieve, and being given the opportunity, will teach it that it must sometimes hold itself. Once home, the puppy should be praised and played with when it relieves on cue in the designated relieving area.
- If the puppy is unstoppable in a relieving accident, the handler should ignore the pup while it completes relieving and while cleaning up the accident. The handler should determine to be more vigilant in observing the puppy for warning signals in the future.
- Negative relieving habits can develop quickly. If a puppy has an accident on a walk the raiser should contact the leader immediately. Together a plan can be created to prevent a negative pattern being initiated that could lead to eventual career change.

Problem Solving Relieving Issues - When to Check With Your Leader or CFR

Ongoing relieving issues should be taken seriously as they can impede the puppy's success as a guide dog. Puppies over 5 months of age that have two or more relieving accidents in the course of their raising are considered to have a relieving issue.

Examples of more common relieving issues:

- Older puppies that are slow to relieve away from home leading to having accidents. A puppy who fully understands the cue to "Do Your Business" should be able to relieve away from home when required. There will be times when it is not practical to wait until the puppy arrives home to relieve such as puppy sitting exchanges, overnight travel and on outings longer than 4 hours.
- A puppy on a predictable relieving schedule that surprises the raiser with an extra stool on outings due to stress/excitement/stimulation. Puppies that only have accidents on outings should be monitored for signs of stress. The Socialization Guide should be utilized along with close supervision and monitoring by the leader and CFR.
- Many puppies need to have two bowel movements before they are truly empty; should the puppy be taken on an outing before it is empty it may produce the second stool when it becomes stimulated. These puppies need to be praised for the first bowel movement then immediately cast out again and prompted to finish relieving. If the raiser knows the pup has not completed relieving it should not go on the outing.

- A puppy that needs to urinate frequently, with an inability to control itself despite being cleared of any medical reason by a veterinarian. A “relieving diary” should be initiated tracking feeding, water consumption and relieving habits. Pups that tend to “tank up” should be offered limited amounts of water on a schedule (in consultation with the CFR.)
- A puppy that produces large amounts of feces leading to multiple stools per day and/or frequent urgency. Puppies that produce abnormal amounts of waste and have difficulty holding themselves may need to be placed on a lower residue diet after consultation with the CFR.

Tips for Preventing Filth Eating

Eating stools (i.e. “coprophagia”) is understandably an undesirable habit in both a puppy and a working guide. Young puppies may pick up, play with and even eat their own feces or that of another dog. This often starts out of boredom, but may soon become a habit. Some puppies are inherently more interested in this behavior than others however; it is much easier to prevent a habit than to extinguish it once developed.

Key points:

- Keep the area clean. The fewer opportunities the puppy has to pick up a stool, the less likely the pup will develop the habit.
- Handlers should supervise the puppy when in the yard and interrupt any interest in stools. Keeping a puppy on a dragline makes this much easier.
- If the puppy attempts to investigate a stool the raiser should redirect the puppy with a tug on the dragline.
- If a puppy has a repeated tendency to filth eat, the leader should be contacted. There are various additives on the market that may be recommended for dogs that practice this behavior. Leader and CFR approval is required before trying these products on a GDB puppy. If additives are suggested, all dogs in the household will need to be treated.
- All dogs are attracted to, and will eat, cat feces if the opportunity arises; this is not technically referred to as filth eating. Ingesting stools from the litter box can cause illness. Puppies should not have access to litter boxes.

Teaching appropriate relieving habits is one of the most important things a raiser can do when raising a guide dog puppy. A dog that relieves indiscriminately cannot become a working guide or a member of the breeding colony. If the puppy is started correctly with close attention paid to these guidelines the process is quite simple. Leaders and CFRs should be consulted sooner than later if an issue arises; not allowing the practice of inappropriate relieving is the key to success..