



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Puppy Raising Department

Swimming and Wading for GDB Puppies

Playing in water and swimming can be a great way to exercise a GDB puppy on warmer days. Some GDB puppies have no interest in swimming and should not be forced to enter water. Below are some tips and guidelines to make sure puppies stay safe and healthy.

Puppies should be introduced to water slowly and positively. The puppy's comfort level determines how quickly to proceed. Puppies should never be pulled into water but should be encouraged verbally and may be rewarded with kibble for entering the water. A dog that enjoys playing in water may act as a mentor for unsure puppies. Forcing a puppy into water may develop an aversion to water that would be detrimental to a working guide.

Puppies may gain confidence being introduced to water in a plastic kiddie pool. The water should be very shallow at first. The pup may be encouraged to enter by putting a favorite toy in the pool or having the handler step into the pool themselves and coax the puppy to follow.

Swimming Pools

- Puppies over four months of age may be carefully introduced to a swimming pool if the pool is easily accessible for the pup to step into. Puppies should not be picked up and placed in the pool. If the puppy enters the water voluntarily the handler should allow it to stay for just a minute or two before showing it how to get out of the pool. This should be repeated several times until the pup knows exactly where the exit is.
- Puppies must be attended at all times in swimming pool areas.
- If the swimming pool is not securely fenced the pup must be swam on a long line.
- Only swimming pools with steps, as opposed to a ladder, are suitable for puppies to swim in.
- Pools must be fenced so that the pup does not have unattended access.
- It is recommended but not required that puppies wear a life jacket when swimming. The buoyancy of the jacket may give beginner puppies some additional security when they can no longer touch the bottom!

Ponds, Sloughs, Lakes, Rivers

- Puppies should be at least four months old and must not be forced to enter the water.
- Puppies must always be on a leash or long line.
- Bodies of water inhabited by wildlife may be contaminated with bacteria such as giardia. Cyanobacteria, formerly called "blue-green algae" is common in some areas in the summertime and can be lethal to pets. Puppies should not swim in areas that would be unsuitable for humans to swim.
- Raisers should be aware of hazards such as submerged branches, fishing line etc.
- A gradual entry into the water is safer and less frightening to the pup than a steep bank; boat ramps and gently sloping banks are excellent entry points.
- Currents can be unpredictably strong; GDB pups should never be swam in a current.
- Raisers should take into consideration the dog traffic; good places for dogs to swim often have off-leash dogs around and are not safe for a GDB puppy.
- It is recommended but not required that puppies wear a life jacket when swimming. The buoyancy of the jacket may give beginner puppies some additional security when they can no longer touch the bottom!

Ocean

All the above should also be considered when taking a pup to the beach. The ocean can be overwhelming to some pups and highly stimulating to others.

- Great caution should be taken even wading in the ocean with puppies and of course, pups should be on leash.
- Puppies that have played in the ocean should have their coats rinsed thoroughly afterwards to prevent irritation from the salt.

Additional Precautions

Anytime a dog swims it will expose its ears to moisture. Excessive moisture in the ear can contribute to ear infections. Care must be taken to dry and air out the pup's ears after swimming. Pups that swim regularly may need additional precautions; raisers should check with their CFR if the pup swims often.