Play is an essential part of puppyhood and a great way to build a strong bond and create happy memories with the guide dog puppy you're raising! There are many ways that puppies can play, including one-on-one with people and other dogs. Not every dog enjoys all styles of play – explore different games to see what your pup likes!

Here are some helpful tips for playing one-on-one with a puppy:

1. Talk in a silly voice! Puppies love it when you act goofy with them.
2. Use dog toys to engage with the pup. Tug toys, retrieving toys, and soft toys are all great options. Be sure to review our Exercise Play and Toys policy for suggestions on safe and durable toys.
3. Encourage appropriate play by rewarding the puppy with a happy voice, food, and affection when they play nicely.
4. Avoid rough play or games that may encourage the pup to be mouthy or jump up. Puppies have short attention spans and may get tired or overstimulated easily. Give your puppy breaks and time to rest as needed.

Safety Tips!
- Puppies should only be allowed off leash in enclosed spaces. If you don't have a yard or appropriate space to play with the pup, you can use a longline in an open, grassy area to give the puppy room to play.
- Be sure to give the pup plenty of water breaks!
- Any active games should be played on non-slip surfaces (carpet, grass, etc.) to reduce the risk of injury.
- Time the games apart from meals so the puppy does not have a full stomach.
- Although exercise is good for both humans and dogs, do not jog, bike, or skateboard with puppies. Jogging can injure young puppy joints.

Did you know? Play helps puppies develop coordination, social skills, and is an important outlet for mental and physical exercise.

Interactive Play

_Tug_
Start by offering the puppy a toy and lightly pulling when they grab it. Keep the toy at the dog’s face level to prevent jumping. Use an encouraging voice or make fun sounds to keep the pup engaged! If the puppy starts to mouth your hands, take a break. Avoid swinging or lifting the puppy off the ground while playing tug as this can cause injury. Occasionally trade for a piece of kibble to take a break and remove the toy. If the pup would prefer to run around or just settle to chew the toy, try a different game instead.

_Hide & Seek_
This game is best played with two people. Have a helper interact with the puppy while you hide nearby. At first, keep this easy (like hiding around a corner). Once hidden, call the pup! Celebrate and reward with kibble when they find you! Then switch roles and have your friend hide and call. As the puppy gets better at finding you, you can get more creative with your hiding spots. If the pup gets mouthy when playing, offer a tug or other toy for them to parade around when they find you!

_Retrieving (fetch)_
Have two of the same toy (e.g. Large ChuckIt! Ultra Ball) so you can exchange toys during the game. Keep the puppy stationary while you throw the toy to reduce the risk of the pup over-shooting and
tumbling/hurting themselves. Encourage the pup to bring the toy all the way back to you and exchange for a kibble or another identical toy. Don't chase the puppy with the toy! A longline can help prevent the pup from playing keep away. If the pup would prefer to play tug or just settle to chew the toy, try a different game instead.

**Dog-Dog Play**

Playing with other dogs can be a great way for puppies to develop social skills, have fun, and get exercise. Many puppies love to engage with other furry friends! Here are some tips to keep puppy play appropriate:

1. Supervise playtime in a controlled environment, such as a fenced backyard.
2. Invite a known, friendly dog over for play time! (e.g. other GDB puppies, Career Change dogs, dog friends) It's best to keep play time between two dogs rather than larger groups.
3. Allow the dogs to greet on their own terms. Don't force the dogs to interact if either is uncomfortable.
4. Allow play to continue as long as you see loose, playful body language such as wagging tails, play bows, and relaxed body language. These are indicators that both dogs are enjoying the interaction.
5. Interrupt and redirect play if it becomes too rough or if the dogs become too aroused (e.g. hackling, grabbing face/neck skin, barreling into each other). Call the puppy over to you, distract them with a toy, or simply separate them from the other dog for a brief time-out.

**Did you know?** During play, dogs naturally take brief breaks by engaging with a toy or sniffing the ground.