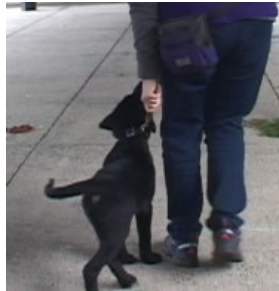




Guide Dogs for the Blind

Collar Cues Game



Goal Behavior

The puppy responds to subtle pressure on the leash to step backwards, forwards, sideways and to pivot. It may also cue the puppy into down, sit and stand positions. Collar pressure helps teach the puppy the perfect “heel” position and allows us to communicate exactly where we want the puppy when practicing the “foundation positions.” It prepares the puppy for loose leash walking and promotes responsiveness on leash.

Video Reference

Collar Cues Game: https://youtu.be/o_XZJ-u50mA

Prerequisite

The puppy is familiar with the Ground Tether games and chooses to remain close to the handler on a loose leash. He understands that keeping a loose leash and moving toward fixed pressure will earn rewards.

Teaching collar cues to a puppy is more easily accomplished when the puppy is small. Obviously, it is physically easier to prompt a smaller dog to move. Also, when the young pup hasn't had much exposure to sitting on cue, he is more maneuverable. For this reason we ask you not to focus on “sit” for the first weeks that you have your puppy. Don't intentionally have a young puppy sit for meals or teaching him to sit for rewards. Don't worry if your puppy is already “sit happy” as he'll still get the idea of moving with collar cues; it's just easier to prompt a puppy to move when they are standing.

The Game's Training Objectives

With the handler stationary (feet remaining still), the puppy yields to light pressure on the collar to move it in any given direction. At first the collar cues will be back and forth around the handler, toward the handler and away from the handler. Once the puppy understands giving to pressure, it will be asked to move backwards, sideways, and to incrementally pivot into “heel” position.

First Session Set Up

- Use a low distraction environment
- Equipment needs: Flat collar, leash, suitable food rewards.
- Handler may be seated or standing. If the puppy wants to “mug” you for the food when you are seated, place the kibble on a counter where you can reach it while seated and hand it to him from there. Meanwhile work on your polite taking of food exercises separately.

Key Handling Points

- The fixed pressure is applied gradually and gently in a specific direction.
- The moment you feel the puppy yield (his feet may not actually move at first) mark with “nice”, immediately loosen the collar (moving your hand toward the puppy's neck), and reward.

- You may use either hand to hold the leash in the beginning stage.
- When you first introduce this game it doesn't matter if the puppy is in front or to either side of you.
- Once the pup is going back and forth easily, it is time to progress to the next stage. Begin to focus on moving the puppy to your left side; ultimately that's where we want the puppy to be.
- Careful delivery location of the reward, in heel position, will encourage the puppy to strive for that position.
- As the puppy becomes responsive to light pressure cues on the collar, add cues backwards and sideways. When introducing new directions, initially mark and reward for very small movements to the collar pressure.

Next Steps

Now that the puppy understands response to collar pressure you can start moving your feet and having the puppy move with you as he yields to the collar pressure towards heel position. Take small steps at first to make it simple for the puppy to find the sweet spot next to you.

Teaching the puppy to pivot its rear end into heel position is a useful skill. Most often when a puppy, or even a guide in training, is not straight, it's because it is wrapping its shoulders around in front of the handler and swinging its rear end out. Being able to respond to subtle collar cues to move the rear end in will help keep the dog straight and close to the handler. A fun way to teach this pivoting into a straight heel position is to play the "Around the Clock" game.

The "Around the Clock" Game

Imagine a clock face with your feet facing 12 o'clock and the puppy by your side. You are going to turn counter-clockwise so that your feet are now facing 10 o'clock. Collar cue the puppy into heel position, mark and reward. While the puppy is eating the food reward, turn in place again so that you are facing 8 o'clock; cue the puppy into heel position with the leash, mark and reward. While the puppy is enjoying his reward, pivot to face 6 o'clock then gently cue him into heel position again. You don't necessarily have to go the whole way around the clock; with a young puppy only do a few pivots before breaking off and giving your puppy verbal praise and petting.

Key Handling Points

- Your hand may need to hold the leash very close to the collar to control the direction of the cue.
- The pressure is applied backwards and inwards at the same time, the way we want the dog's rear end to go. (In the Video, observe the motion of the handlers leash hands as collar cues are given into heel. Where the leash passes over the little finger, the hand twists backwards and towards the left leg to cue the puppy into the heel position.)

Collar Pressure Downwards, Upwards, Forwards

Prerequisite

The puppy demonstrates consistent responses to light collar cues backwards and sideways into heel position.

Collar pressure cues downward and upwards will cue the puppy to fold into a down position and move upwards into a sit.

- Apply fixed pressure down, towards the floor, on the puppy's collar. Mark and release the pressure the moment the puppy gives to the pressure. He may not go all the way down when first learning to follow downwards collar cues. You will gradually ask for more motion downward until he is actually in a down position before being marked.
- The puppy may go down but immediately pop up again. That's OK, we are not asking for a stay. So long as you mark as soon as he goes down he will get the idea.
- Gentle pressure upwards when the puppy is in a down position should cause him to come up into a sit.
- First introduce forward collar cues to show the puppy that he can move forward from heel position. Then progress to forward collar cues out of a sit position and out of a down position. Initially mark and release the pressure at the moment the puppy moves with each cue.

Collar cues are a way to communicate with your puppy that will come in useful in so many ways as you train together. They are also an invaluable part of a guide dog-in-training's repertoire. Have fun with these games and give your puppy a head start for his future as a guide!