



# Guide Dogs for the Blind

## Exercise and Play

Daily exercise and play are as important as nutrition, grooming and other activities in raising a healthy, well-behaved GDB puppy. Guide dogs are active animals. Returning to campus trim and well-muscled will make the transition to guide work training easier on the puppy. Exercise and play will also help the pup bond with the raiser and is a great stress reliever.

### **Puppies may indicate their need for more exercise by displaying:**

- Excessive excitability
- Inability to settle
- Persistent mouthing
- Running through the house and jumping on furniture

Start early on a regular program of exercise and play. Use the following guidelines to help avoid injuries, behavior problems or overheating when exercising.

### **Watch for these signs of fatigue:**

- Heavy panting
- Excessive salivation
- Tongue lolling far out of the mouth
- Dark pink mucous membranes
- Slowness
- Attempts to lie down

### **Play and exercise appropriately:**

- Play and exercise - which includes running and romping - should occur outside in a fenced area or on a long-line or Flexi-lead if the area is not fenced. Running is acceptable, chase games should be avoided with both other dogs and people. Indoor play should be kept low-key by encouraging the puppy to play with its toys.
- Do not permit or encourage wrestling, roughhousing, chase or racing through the house (use a dragline to prevent)
- Walking on-leash, running in a fenced yard, swimming on a line in a safe environment and GDB approved types of play (interactive play, tug and hide-and-seek) are all good forms of exercise.
- Jogging can damage young, growing joints and should not be used as a form of exercise. Similarly, exercising a GDB puppy from a bicycle or skateboard is not appropriate.

### **Exercise and play in a safe manner**

- Play should be in an enclosed area or on leash at all times
- The amount of exercise should be appropriate for the puppy's age, and energy level
- A puppy that is out of shape will not tolerate much exercise. It should be conditioned appropriately and fed correct amounts of food to bring it to a good level of fitness
- Dogs are more prone to overheating than humans; raisers should use caution when temperatures are high. Puppies may be wetted down to keep them cool. Water should be given frequently, but in small amounts to prevent vomiting.

## **Interactive play**

Play is a crucial element in developing a well-balanced, happy puppy. Puppies learn about their world and how to interact with people through play. It is therefore important to teach the puppy how to play appropriately.

Appropriate play can be used to entertain the pup when it becomes bored, to mildly exercise it and to build its trust and self-control. Play can also be a great stress reliever.

### **Use these general rules when playing with the puppy:**

- Teach the puppy to play "interactively" with games of tug and hide-and-seek
- Provide only GDB approved toys for the puppy; retrieval games aren't appropriate for GDB pups as they might distract a dog from its duty while guiding
- Gentle play should be encouraged; wrestling or rough housing are not appropriate for GDB pups as they could encourage undesirable behaviors
- Do not play chase or keep away

### **When playing, do not encourage or permit the puppy to:**

- become excessively excited
- vocalize
- mouth or grab
- snap
- leap up
- mount

## **Controlling play**

It is important to teach a GDB puppy how to play carefully with people. The raiser should decide:

- when to initiate play
- how the puppy plays
- the level and intensity of play
- when to end the game

## **Begin to play**

- Start play at a time that is convenient, not when the puppy demands it
- Stop play before the puppy is ready to stop (use the "That's Enough" cue to end the game and ignore the puppy if it continues to try to engage)

## **Control the intensity of the game**

- If the puppy gets over aroused, discontinue the game

## **Ensure play stops**

- To stop play, tell the puppy "That's enough" in a calm, firm voice
  - A highly excitable puppy may need to sit and stay for a minute until it calms down. This will help it achieve self-control.
- If a toy is used, take it away, praising the puppy as it releases it
- Quietly and calmly praise the puppy when it calms
- Leave interactive toys out of sight until the next play session.

## **Tug games**

Tug can be a very fun, interactive game to play with the puppy when taught properly and played within the guidelines given below. Approved tug toys are listed in the "Puppy Raising Toy Policy." Tug toys should only be used interactively; otherwise they should be put away.

When playing, keep the tug toy down at dog level, this will help encourage "four on the floor" rather than jumping up and grabbing.

"Play growling" is okay but body language and intensity of play should be monitored to prevent escalation. With any sign of grabbing at hands or other inappropriate behaviors, stop the game. Put the toy aside and do some calming exercises.

Do not swing the dog around while it is holding the toy. This is unsafe for the puppy and may cause injury.

- The tug game should be taught on-leash to prevent inappropriate behaviors and actions by the pup.
- Prevent the following behaviors:
  - jumping up
  - putting feet up
  - mouthing hands or clothing
- Practice starting and stopping the game once or twice per session. When stopping the play, use the “That’s Enough” cue and praise the puppy when it releases the toy.

### **Hide and Seek game**

This exercise teaches the puppy to come even when the pup cannot see its raiser. It should be taught on-leash using food rewards given by each handler. See “Food Induced Recall” for technique. This game should not be played by having the puppy stay or wait before being called. Two handlers are required for the game – one to hold the puppy and one to call the puppy.

- After completing the “Two Handler Come” exercise, the raiser can go around a doorway or corner and then call the puppy. For the first time or two, the raiser can step into sight and go up to the puppy if it does not immediately come. The raiser can show the puppy the food and lure the puppy to come while backing up. Verbal praise should be used as well.
- Practice the sequence until the puppy figures out that even though it can't see the raiser, the raiser is still around.
- After the puppy can successfully come a short distance with handler out of sight, a new handler can be used.
- When the puppy responds promptly, begin gradually increasing the distance and working in different areas.
- Remember to only work this exercise in safely enclosed areas such as inside the house or in a safely fenced area.
- If the puppy becomes overly excited and races indiscriminately throughout the exercise, discontinue play.

### **Toys**

See “Puppy Raising Toy Policy” for the list of currently approved toys.

Toys are an important part of a puppy's development. Appropriate toys provide mental stimulation, an outlet for normal chewing drive, and provide a positive alternative to destructive chewing of personal property.

A stimulating variety of toys keeps the puppy occupied. Puppies, like children, become bored with the same toys; it is highly recommended that toys be rotated frequently. Puppies should have a number of toys to choose from at all times; not only does this help keep the pup engaged but also reduces the chance of it becoming possessive of its toys.

Not all toys currently on the market are safe for the ages, sizes or breeds of puppies in our program. In addition, some toys and activities are counterproductive to developing a working guide. Remember, a guide must willingly work past common distractions such as balls, Frisbees or other toys encountered in everyday life.

Toys can be effective tools in reducing attention-seeking behaviors such as keep away. Puppies pick up unacceptable items to get attention; praising and admiring the pup that parades its toys will make it less likely to steal household items. Bringing its toys to the raiser is to be encouraged, but raisers should not throw toys for a pup to retrieve.

Even the best toys experience normal wear and tear. Toys should be routinely checked for any damage, splintering, or wear. Special attention should be paid to ensure the toy has not become worn that it is a choking or ingesting hazard. Some dogs are voracious chewers and will destroy even the strongest, safest toys.

Please review the document [Food Containing Toys: Stuffed Kong and Wobbler](#) for guidelines on use and seeking permission to offer toys containing food.