



Guide Dogs for the Blind

GDB FAQs for Puppy Raisers

Q: How does GDB's puppy raising program work?

A: Puppy raising volunteers raise our guide dog puppies in their homes from when the pups are approximately 8 weeks old until they are about 15 months old. The dogs then return to one of our campuses for formal guide dog training.

Raisers all belong to puppy raising clubs in their local areas that are led by trained volunteers, with oversight by a GDB staff member. The clubs have regular meetings, and provide puppy raisers with instruction, socialization outings, training support, camaraderie, and more! Our puppy raising program is made up of more than 2,000 puppy raising volunteer families in the following states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Texas, Utah and Washington.

Puppy raisers are responsible for teaching the puppies good manners and basic obedience. You can have other pets in your home and if you are not able to commit to raising a puppy full time, there are still other ways to get involved with your local puppy club, such as puppy sitting. And, GDB's puppy raising program complements many FFA, 4H, home schooling, high school, and college programs.

Q: How often do puppy clubs meet?

A: Puppy clubs meet a minimum of twice a month and sometimes as much as four times a month.

Q: How do I become a puppy raiser?

A: Becoming a puppy raiser is a combination of learning puppy development techniques, attending club meetings, and having multiple opportunities to handle puppies.

Q: What costs are covered in GDB's puppy raising program?

A: Veterinary care is entirely paid for by Guide Dogs for the Blind. We also provide leashes, collars, and other training equipment.

Q: What supplies does a puppy raiser need to provide?

A: Puppy raisers provide food, toys, and sometimes crates for the puppy.

Q: Am I allowed to have other pets in the home while I raise a guide dog puppy?

A: Yes, as long as the other pets are well behaved and don't negatively impact the puppy's training. Our dogs need to learn to be comfortable around other animals so having other pets in the home can be extremely helpful.

Q: Is it necessary to have previous dog experience to be a guide dog puppy raiser?

A: No, it is not necessary to have previous dog experience. Part of becoming a puppy raiser is having time to learn and practice the training techniques learned in our puppy raising program.

Q: Do you have a youth puppy raising program and what are the age requirements?

A: No, we do not have a specific youth puppy raising program. The minimum age requirement to raise a puppy is nine years old.

Q: Can I raise a puppy if I work or go to school full time?

A: Yes, if you are able to take the puppy to work or school with you. If your work or school doesn't allow puppies in training to attend, we can facilitate a co-raising arrangement in which a single puppy can be raised in two different households to accommodate raisers' work schedules and time commitments.

Q: How soon can I get a puppy after applying?

A: It takes approximately three months of attending puppy club meetings to fulfill the pre-requisites required to receive a puppy.

Q: What type of training methods do you use with your puppies?

A: We use positive reinforcement as the basis for most of our puppy training exercises.

Q: Do puppies ever get to be “normal” and have fun?

A: Yes, every puppy has daily training exercises, but the rest of their day contains normal puppy activities such as playing and exercising.

Q: Do I need to have a fenced yard to raise a puppy?

A: No, a fenced yard is not absolutely required, but a puppy raiser must have access to a safe and secure outside area to relieve and exercise the puppy.

Q: What do I do with a puppy if I go on vacation or have an emergency?

A: Depending on the circumstances of the trip, a puppy may be able to accompany you on your vacation. If it is not appropriate or possible for the puppy to attend the vacation or there is an emergency, the puppy raising club leader assists with finding another puppy raising home to provide temporary care for the puppy.

Q: What happens if the puppy I’m raising doesn’t make it?

A: Puppies that don’t graduate as guide dogs or enter into our breeding colony are known as “career change” dogs. If a puppy is career changed, it is first considered for placement in GDB’s K9 Buddy program (which places dogs as pets with children or youth who are blind or visually impaired and their families), or with one of GDB’s partner service dog organizations. If neither are viable options, then the puppy raiser usually is given the option to adopt the dog as a pet.

Q: Will I get to meet the individual who received the dog I raised?

A: Usually, yes. Puppy raisers are invited to attend the graduation of the puppy they have raised, whether the dog becomes a guide dog or a member of our breeding colony. Graduation generally includes time to meet the dog’s handler or breeder custodians. There are circumstances where guide dog teams are trained in-home and will not be present at a graduation ceremony.

Q: Is it hard to give the puppy up?

A: Yes. We are fortunate to have many puppy raisers who have raised more than one dog for us. They tell us that it is always hard to bring the dog back to campus but their emotions are outweighed by the exciting possibility that the dog they raised could provide enhanced safety, independence, and inclusion for someone who is blind or visually impaired.

Q: Are there other ways to participate with Guide Dog for the Blind if I am unsure about making a 12-18 month commitment?

A: Yes, within the puppy raising program there are opportunities for volunteers to do more than raise a puppy full time. If you live near one of our campuses, there are many campus volunteer opportunities as well.

Q: Where is GDB located?

A: GDB has two campuses: one is headquartered in San Rafael, California (20 miles north of San Francisco), another in Boring, Oregon (25 miles east of Portland).

Q: Whom does GDB serve?

A: Any person who is blind or visually impaired living in the United States or Canada desiring enhanced mobility and independence. The person must be legally blind, able to travel independently (good orientation and mobility skills), and well-suited to work with a dog. All of our services are provided completely free of charge to our clients.

Q: Where does GDB receive its funding?

A: GDB is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization supported entirely by private donations. We receive no government funding. Donors contribute through general contributions, bequests, grants, memorial and honor donations, charitable remainder trusts, and other planned giving options.

Q: Do you have to be totally blind to use a guide dog?

A: No. Many of our clients do have some vision; you do, however, need to be legally blind. Good orientation and mobility skills are also essential prior to getting a guide dog.

Q: How old do you have to be to train with a guide dog?

A: Because it takes a level of maturity, discipline, and commitment to work with a guide dog, the majority of our students are 18 and older, but there is no age requirement.

Q: How long is GDB's client training program?

A: Our in-residence training classes for our clients are two weeks long. We provide highly customized instruction; classes generally have 4-6 students and the ratio of students to instructors is 2:1. GDB also provides graduates with a lifetime of support.

Q: Are working guide dogs allowed to go everywhere a person can go?

A: Yes. According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, a guide dog is allowed any place a person can go.

Q: How many guide dog teams have graduated from GDB?

A: More than 15,000 teams have graduated since our founding in 1942, and there are approximately 2,200 active guide dog teams across North America.

Q: What does Guide Dogs for the Blind do differently than other schools?

A: Guide Dogs for the Blind is recognized worldwide as a model for innovative training, unprecedented support of guide dog partnerships after graduation, and the success rate of our graduates via a world-class alumni association and veterinary financial assistance, as needed. There is no other guide dog school in the country that offers the level of training and the degree of hands-on support for the partnership after graduation.

Q: Do the guide dogs ever get to play?

A: Yes! When a guide dog is not working and not wearing its harness, playing and relaxing is definitely encouraged. It's also a great way for a handler and dog to bond and strengthen their partnership.

Q: Is it okay to pet a working guide dog?

A: It's an essential courtesy to first ask for permission from the handler before petting a guide dog. It's important for a working dog to stay focused for the safety of the team and maintenance of training standards.

Q: Is it okay for a pet dog to greet a guide dog?

A: Before you consider allowing your dog to greet a working guide dog, please understand the importance of asking permission first, so the handler can be prepared. Your dog should also be on leash and under control. Guide dogs are also not trained to be protection dogs – they are busy safely guiding their partners when out in public.

Q: What should drivers do when they see a guide dog in training or a blind person using a dog?

A: We encourage drivers to be attentive, as you would with any other pedestrians, especially when turning right-on-red. GDB trains its guide dogs in real-world situations, so it's helpful that you continue going on about your business. Please don't stop and honk, yell out your window, or otherwise distract someone using a guide dog. The person is listening for traffic flow to determine when it is safe to give the command to go forward and cross the street.

Q. What unique skills does a guide dog have?

A: Leading a person in a straight line from point A to point B, stopping for all changes in elevation (including curbs and stairs), stopping for overhead obstacles (such as tree limbs), and avoiding obstacles in their path.

Q. What are some things guide dogs cannot do?

A: Read traffic signals and determine the route to a new destination.

Q: Do you train other types of service dogs?

A: We only provide highly trained guide dogs and are focused exclusively on working with people with vision loss. We do consult with, and donate selected career change dogs to, a number of other service organizations.

Q: What is GDB's position on fraudulent service dogs?

A: Guide Dogs for the Blind does not agree with, nor does it support the training or use of fraudulent service dogs. Personal testimonies from many of our clients demonstrate that fraudulent service dogs pose a variety of challenges for people with disabilities who travel with properly trained service dogs. Some of these challenges include safety, health, and dog attack risks, as well as the erosion of the positive image of a formally trained service dog in the eyes of business owners and the public. Fraudulent service dogs pose a fundamental threat to the access, independence, and mobility that service dogs enable.

Guide Dogs for the Blind is aware of the hazards and complications fraudulent service dogs pose to an officially designated working dog. A "fraudulent service dog," is any dog that is not formally trained to perform a specific service to assist a person with a disability. The three major laws that give access to a service dog and a person with a disability are the Americans with Disabilities Act; Fair Housing Act; and The Air Carrier Access Act. There is a lack of consistency between these major pieces of legislation, which provide incentives for people to train and use fraudulent service dogs. Apart from the California State Board of Guide Dog Schools, there is no established federal or state administration to set and enforce rules pertaining to service dog regulations.

Q: Why does GDB breed their own dogs and why don't they use shelter dogs?

A: In the past, GDB attempted to source dogs from local shelter and animal rescue organizations. We did this for several years and it was met with very minimal success. Many dogs did not qualify from the get go because they must be free from orthopedic and eye disease. It also took an enormous amount of manpower resources for our staff to find them. Many of the few dogs who did pass the basic health screen did not have the level of confidence for work in the environments that a guide travels. The temperamental traits that cause a guide to be suitable (high confidence, high manageability, low distraction, biddable, adaptable, friendly) are not always found in dogs at a shelter or rescue organization (especially given the unknown factor of their background and what they might have been exposed to). We also rely greatly on our puppy raisers' time and dedication they put in to create the best possible guide dogs that are socialized early on in life.

Q: What breeds does GDB use?

A: GDB currently only uses Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers,, and Labrador/Golden crosses (as is common throughout the world). In the past, GDB used other breeds but found our current breeds to be the most suitable for due to health, temperament, size, coat type, and adaptability.

Q: Why doesn't GDB actively breed for chocolate Labs?

A: While most Labradors from GDB are either black or yellow, GDB does have dogs in our breeding colony that carry the gene for chocolate, and occasionally chocolate puppies are born. Chocolate puppies follow the same raising and training process as all other puppies and have the same opportunity to become successful working guides. To put it simply, the genes that determine if a puppy will be chocolate are recessive, which means both parents must have the gene to have a chance to produce chocolate offspring. Because GDB focuses primarily on choosing parents who will have puppies with the highest temperament and health qualities to succeed as working guides, GDB does not deliberately match up parents who carry the chocolate gene. On occasions where mate selection factors indicate that an ideal match would be between two parents carrying for the chocolate color there is still no guarantee that any puppies born will be chocolate, which is why it is so rare in the GDB population. For anyone wanting more information about coat color genetics you can visit the breeding department's favorite and informative website doggenetics.co.uk.

Q: How can I support GDB?

A: There are a lot of ways to support Guide Dogs for the Blind. You can volunteer on a GDB campus, help raise guide dog puppies, become a breeding stock custodian, provide a home to a retired dog, donate funds and services, or fundraise in your community. You can also introduce us to your friends, follow us on our social media channels, and if you know someone who is blind, please be sure to tell them about our program and free services.