



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Puppy Raising Department

“Go to Bed” Game

The “Go to Bed” game is not a priority in the puppy raising curriculum. It is, however, really fun for the puppy and handler! The game encourages the puppy to offer behaviors to earn rewards and gives it opportunities in “dog’s choice” learning. This early experience will help promote a great attitude toward training as the puppy enters guidework.

New handlers can learn a lot about R+ training from this game. It’s a great way to practice observation and timing skills and it is an excellent introduction to mark and reward training.

Goal Behavior

On the verbal cue “Go to Bed” the puppy goes to a designated spot (a bed or mat), lies down and stays there until released. Eventually distractions can be added, so that the pup becomes sufficiently reliable at staying on the bed for the behavior to be used in practical, everyday situations e.g. when the family is eating, or when visitors come to the door.

Video Overview

<https://youtu.be/R9A3bx2fulw>

Set Up

A dog bed or a mat with a non-skid backing is used as the target area. The same bed/mat should always be used for the initial training but later on, once the pup is fluent in the behavior, a different bed/mat can be used. The dog bed/mat used for this exercise must be picked up after each session until the puppy is trained. The reason for this is so that the puppy is not being ignored when it *chooses* to “Go to Bed” – the pup must be rewarded every time it offers the behavior.

Note: Much later, once the puppy is very fluent in the “Go to Bed” behavior, the bed can be left out as the puppy learns it will only be rewarded when it goes to the bed on the verbal cue. This is called “command discrimination”. Just like a dog that sits of its own accord multiple times per day also sits on cue as a trained behavior.

It is preferable that this exercise is done off-leash so that there is no chance of the raiser inhibiting or guiding the puppy with the leash. If practicing in a setting where off-leash work is impractical (e.g. a club meeting) the handler should let the leash/longline slide through the hand easily as the puppy goes toward the mat or bed. We do not want to inhibit the puppy from making the decision to “Go to Bed”! A Flexi extendable leash might work for this or several ex-pens hooked together to make an enclosure would be ideal.

The puppy should not be guided onto the mat with the leash! This should be the puppy’s choice: go on the mat and get the reward or don’t go on the mat and miss a chance for reward.

First games should be in a quiet, familiar environment. Placing the mat/bed on a hard floor, or at least the mat being a contrasting color, will make it easier for the puppy to distinguish the target area. An actual dog bed with sides seems to be most inviting, and helps keep the puppy contained on the target more easily, but a mat is easier for the pup to get onto initially. In this document “bed” and “mat” are interchangeable.

Step 1 - Introduction

- The handler should stand near the mat in such a way that the puppy will step onto the mat. The pup doesn't have to put all of its feet on the bed or mat. Even if it places one foot on the target the pup should be marked and rewarded. The puppy should not be lured onto the mat. At first it may be almost accidental that the pup's feet land on the mat. We want the puppy to figure out that stepping on the mat makes the mark/reward happen.
- The puppy should be rewarded several times on the mat. The handler should move in quickly to deliver the reward so that the puppy doesn't leave the mat after the mark to reach for the food. It's OK to preload the hands with kibble for the first sessions so that the pup can be rewarded quickly.
- To get the puppy off the mat in between repetitions, the pup can be drawn away with the handler's body language and an "OK!" or the Food Induced Recall practiced.
- A couple of short sessions a day (no more than 10 reps each time) should be enough to give the pup the idea. Each puppy is different but usually within 3 days or less the puppy will be targeting the mat or bed with the handler right there.

Step 2 – Less maneuvering by the handler

- The handler should try to give less body language to guide the pup onto the mat. *Gradually* fading the body language is the key. Sometimes just the handler staying still and looking at the mat will be enough of a cue for the pup to figure it out. The handler should stay close to the mat – no more than a step away at most.
- The puppy should receive 3-5 rewards on the mat, to build up value for being on the mat, before being released.
- If the pup is not putting all of its feet on the mat or bed it will help to lure it slightly toward the center of the bed at it is being rewarded. So after the puppy steps on the mat and is marked, as the handler reaches in to deliver the reward, they can lure the pup toward the center of the bed. If the puppy sits or lies down it should be rewarded but standing is fine too at this point.
- The puppy should still be marked for putting any number of feet or any part of its body on the mat. It should now begin to want to be on the mat/in the bed due to the high rate of reinforcement given there.
- A few more days at this level and the pup should be ready for step 3.

Step 3 – Handler in different position and luring into sit

- From different angles around the bed/mat, but no more than a few short steps away, the handler should repeat the above. Dogs don't generalize well, so just because the puppy understands to go to the mat from the handler's left; it doesn't mean the pup understands to go when it is on the handler's right. Also changing the location of the bed/mat in the room could confuse the puppy. It's best to continue placing the mat in one particular area for now.
- The handler should start asking for at least two paws on the mat before marking. The puppy may stare at the handler expectantly when it puts one paw on the mat but the handler should just wait. The pup will probably then shuffle around and somehow hit the mat with more feet and should be marked and rewarded. If the pup doesn't get the idea it should be called away and restarted. The handler should then re-approach using body positioning to help the pup get more of its body on the mat. Setting up the environment to help the puppy is fair at this point; putting the bed in a corner may help the pup "find" the target more easily.
- The puppy should now be lured into a sit after it is marked. So the reward is given in such a way that the puppy puts its bottom on the mat as it takes the reward.

- Depending on the puppy, several days of practice at this level should be sufficient before moving on to the next step.

Step 4 – Increasing distance, adding cue

- The handler should move a couple of inches further back from the mat and repeat the above. Within several sessions the puppy should go to the mat from a few feet away. It may even be difficult to keep the pup *off* the mat! The handler should move in quickly after the mark to reward multiple times on the mat.
- Once the behavior is happening consistently and predictably the verbal cue “Go to Bed” may be added. A way to recognize if the behavior is sufficiently solid to add the verbal cue: Can the handler confidently predict the puppy *will* go to the mat. Would they bet \$20 on it? The verbal cue “Go to Bed” should only be added when the handler is positive the puppy is about to move to the mat/bed.
- Perhaps the puppy now wants to stay on the mat/bed as it associates the place with a high rate of reinforcement. If the handler has been luring into a sit or down the puppy probably now offers one of those positions as soon as it gets onto the mat. If the puppy doesn’t offer the behavior yet but just stands, it is not a problem. The pup should still be marked as soon as the majority of its body/feet are on the mat. If it offers a sit (or even a down!) immediately it can be marked and rewarded.
- After several more days of practice a couple of times per day, the puppy should be ready for the next step.

Step 5 – Raising criteria - sit

- Now the handler is going to go back to being closer to the mat, making it easier for the puppy, and raise the criteria. So rather than marking as soon as the pup gets on the mat/bed, the handler is going to withhold the mark until the puppy offers a sit. If the puppy should offer a down that is wonderful; the pup should be marked and given multiple rewards in the down position. Many pups, however, will offer a sit at this stage of the game. The pup should be marked immediately when it sits and given several rewards for staying on the bed. All rewards should be offered low to help lure the pup into a down but it’s OK if the puppy doesn’t actually lie down. It was marked for a sit and should be rewarded for the sit. The purpose of rewarding low is to encourage the pup to lower its body but if that doesn’t happen yet it’s no problem.
- Should the puppy not sit as soon as it hits the bed then the handler should wait... not mark but wait to see if the puppy will figure out to sit. When the puppy sits it should be marked and rewarded then rewarded several more times for holding the sit (or down if it offers) before being called off the bed.
- If the puppy doesn’t offer a sit after 6-10 seconds it should be called off the bed and restarted. Sometimes it takes a couple of reps for the pup to figure out that now sitting earns the mark. For the puppy that doesn’t offer a sit after three trials, the handler should go back to marking and rewarding for the puppy standing on the bed but being sure to lure into a sit as the reward is delivered. Several more rewards should be given for holding the sit or offering a down. After several more sessions of practice the handler can then try again to wait out the puppy and it will probably offer a sit or down.

Step 6 – Raising criteria - down

- After several days of the pup offering a sit as soon as it hits the bed the same procedure of withholding the mark can be used to see if the puppy will offer a down. If the puppy has been lured down multiple times on the mat it will probably offer that position when the mark is withheld for the sit.
- If the puppy doesn’t offer a down after 6-10 seconds it should be called off the bed and restarted. Sometimes it takes a couple of reps for the pup to figure out that now downing earns the mark. For

the puppy that doesn't offer a down after three trials, then the handler should go back to marking and rewarding for the puppy sitting on the bed but being sure to lure into a down as the reward is given. Multiple rewards (4-8) should be given for holding the down. After several more sessions of practice the handler can then try again to wait out the puppy and it will probably offer a down.

The distance the puppy is sent to the bed should be increased very gradually. Once the puppy is reliably going to the mat/bed in one area of the home the mat/bed may be moved to a different location. The criteria must be lowered at first, so once again the handler will need to be closer to the bed, and perhaps mark for just stepping on the bed the first several times the puppy is sent. Once the puppy understands the game is the same in the new location the criteria can be raised.

Lowering the criteria = making it easier for the puppy to be successful by backing up several steps in the training.

Duration/Staying on the Bed

It is very important to give multiple rewards to the puppy for staying in position on the bed. If the puppy is a very active, busy pup where staying still is a challenge, the handler may have to keep up a very high rate of reinforcement. Calmer puppies can wait several seconds between rewards. At first the handler will find that preloading the hands with kibble works best (either/both hands may be used to deliver) so that the pup can be rewarded quickly. The time between rewards should be increased very gradually. If the puppy breaks position by getting up or leaving the bed it should be called off the bed (no reward) and started again.

Duration should be built up over multiple sessions by the handler slowing down the rate of reinforcement and going to "clean handling"; that is, the handler marking and then reaching for one kibble in the bag to deliver to the puppy. If the handler forgets to mark "nice!" when rewarding for duration that's OK. The important thing is that the puppy stays on the bed and waits for the kibble to be delivered.

When the puppy is waiting patiently on the bed for the reward to be delivered the handler can start moving around a little between rewards or gradually increasing the distance away from the bed.

The rate of reinforcement for staying on the bed should be *gradually* decreased (over a period of weeks and multiple games) until the puppy is only getting rewarded every couple of minutes and as it matures, just once in a while.

The 3Ds

This is a good time to review the three "Ds" as they apply to a "stay" as duration on the bed is a stay:

Three elements need to be considered when teaching a pup to stay; only one element should be added at a time. When one element is increased in difficulty the other elements should be made easier:

1. **Duration** – the amount of *time* that the puppy is asked to hold the position. This should be built up gradually. A few seconds is a long time for a baby puppy to hold a position!
2. **Distraction** – this could mean handler movement or outside distractions. Handler movement should be worked on first. Initially this may mean just standing up from a crouch or a step to one side then quickly back to the pup to reward. Then perhaps a little jiggle in place. If the pup moves the handler should start again and make it easier for the puppy. Other distractions (such as people, dogs, blowing leaves) should be very minor and a long way from the puppy to begin with. Distractions should be introduced carefully and slowly to allow the pup to be successful.
3. **Distance** - When adding *distance* away from the puppy, the *time* the puppy is expected to maintain the position should be decreased. Distance between the pup and handler should be increased a half step at a time. If the puppy moves the handler needs to stay closer.

Of course the same principals apply to teaching the pup to go to the bed. The distance the pup is sent to the bed will have to be decreased dramatically when the bed is first placed in a new location or if there are distractions.

The first time the pup is asked to demonstrate “Go to Bed” at a puppy meeting for example, the raiser would use a familiar bed/mat, stay close to the bed and lower the criteria: The pup might be marked for just putting a couple of feet on the bed the first few times. With all the distractions of a puppy meeting we want to make the game much easier for the puppy.

Applying to “Real Life” Situations

Once the puppy is fluent at going to the bed and staying there reliably within the training game, distractions can be added that mimic real life scenarios such as:

- While the family is eating
- When cooking/preparing meals in the kitchen
- When pet dogs are receiving attention
- When someone comes to the door or visitors are in the home

It would be unfair, and too much of a leap in raising criteria, to expect a puppy to stay on the bed during exciting events around the home that it has not been prepared for. To utilize the GTB cue in helping manage the puppy at home, the pup needs to be trained for these different situations. Having friends and family help out in setting up scenarios, where the raiser can concentrate on appropriately rewarding the puppy, is a good step toward real life events.

It is difficult to give strict guidelines on how many sessions a puppy will need at each level of training before progressing to the next step. Much depends on the puppy’s individual temperament and the handler’s experience. Having a leader or experienced mentor observe training sessions can be of great assistance. If the puppy is not making progress the raiser should reach out to the club leader for help.