



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Puppy Raising Department

Introducing Foundation Position “Down”

See the video: “Introducing Foundation Position Down with Luring and Physical Prompt”
<https://youtu.be/JGZLYcqjWoA>

Goal Behavior

The puppy responds to a lure/hand signal to lie down.

Note: The correct way to introduce the *verbal* cue to down is explained in the document “Paw Pad Game #4”. If the raiser adds the verbal cue sooner, that is OK, but the puppy probably will not focus on the verbal cue due to the lure/signal “blocking” the verbal cue. Dogs respond much more easily to visual cues (signals) than verbal cues. How to teach the puppy to respond to a verbal cue alone, dispensing with the signal, will be addressed later.

Prerequisites

The puppy should be familiar with Paw Pad Game #3 and be comfortable holding a stand and sit on the pad with at least ten seconds of duration each. The pup must stay still, standing or sitting on the pad comfortably, while the handler moves in and out of position. One to three weeks (depending on the puppy’s progress) of practice on Paw Pad Game #3 is recommended before introducing the down position.

Session Set Up

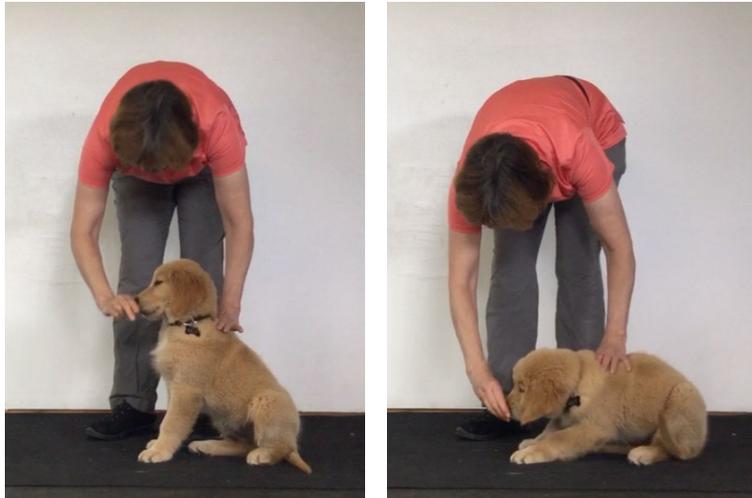
The puppy should be hungry so practicing before meals is a good plan. A Paw Pad will not be required in these initial lessons. The training should take place in a quiet area with no distractions. A comfortable surface should be provided; a cold, hard floor would not be conducive to a prompt down position

Steps

Luring the Down

The Paw Pad is not utilized in the initial introduction of the down signal. It may be easier for the handler to maneuver the puppy into a down position if the pup is out in front of the handler, rather than at the handler’s side, when first introducing the down.

- The puppy is positioned at the side or in front of the handler, wherever is comfortable, and its attention drawn to food in the handler’s hand. Multiple pieces of kibble should be held in the hand and the pup fed pieces as it is lured into a down position (“pezzing”).
- It may be easier initially to draw the pup into a down position from a sit rather than a stand.
- Some raisers will find it more comfortable to kneel or crouch when first luring the down. Being closer to the floor also makes it easier to see what the puppy is doing with its front legs.
- The handler should slowly lower the luring hand straight down toward the floor. The food should be kept right on the puppy’s nose like a magnet and kibbles fed into the pup’s mouth as it begins any movement toward a down position. The puppy is being reinforced for successive approximations; that is, being given multiple rewards for increments toward the down position (continuous pezzing).
- The puppy may be helped by placing a hand on the pup’s withers (top of the shoulders) and gentle pressure applied. The puppy should be weaned from this physical prompt as soon as possible by fading the pressure to a light touch then not touching the puppy at all as it follows the lure into the down.



- Should the puppy raise its rear end out of a sit the food should be raised up to encourage the puppy to sit again.
- If the food is moved too quickly the puppy will not follow it closely. The puppy's muzzle needs to lower to the floor before it will fold its front legs to lie down.
- If the food is moved too far forward, the pup will stand up to reach for it.
- Once the puppy is lying down it should be fed multiple kibbles in succession to keep it in position. Holding a stash of food in both hands may be necessary, or at least feeding with one hand while the other hand reaches into the bag for more kibble.
- After the pup is fed several pieces of kibble while lying down, it should be encouraged to sit up and the procedure repeated several times. To get the puppy up the raiser can lure the pup back into a sit position or move around and encourage the pup to get up to start again.

Troubleshooting

It may take several repetitions of pezzing the puppy for just lowering its head while sitting before the pup will follow the lure all the way down and fold its front legs.

After several sessions of the puppy successfully being pezzed into a down from a sit, the raiser can start pezzing the puppy into a down from a stand position. Although this is generally more difficult, most pups will readily go down from a stand if they have received lots of reinforcement for going down from a sit previously.



Introducing the Down Signal

Once the puppy is readily being pezzed into a down position, the shape of the down signal may be introduced. The difference between a lure and a signal is simple: a lure is hand-held food and a true signal is given with a hand motion that contains no food. The mark “Nice” is not given when a behavior is lured. Once there is no hand-held food being used as a lure, and the signal is pure, the puppy will be marked and rewarded. The down signal is a downward motion with the right hand, palm toward the floor.



Here is a link to a video of the signals for sit, stand and down. Focus on the down signal:

<https://youtu.be/FJJvksyVfFA>

- A single piece of kibble should be placed in the handler's right hand under the thumb, held across the palm.



- The signal should be given close to the puppy's nose at first, as when pezzing. The puppy will probably lie down immediately and the kibble should be released from under the thumb as soon as it does so.
- If the puppy doesn't follow the lure/signal it may be allowed to smell the kibble in the hand before trying again. Moving the hand too quickly or too far away from the puppy will confuse it – for now the signal should be close to the puppy.
- Sometimes the hand containing the food may need to be held on the floor for a second or two and the food not released to the puppy until it has lowered its front legs.
- Once the puppy is downing immediately upon being given the lure/signal, Paw Pad Game #4 may be introduced. It is not necessary for the puppy to be fully weaned off the hand-held food before moving onto Paw Pad Game #4.

Reminders - steps on fading the lure:



1. Lure the pup into position by pezzing



2. Signal hand has a piece of kibble in it but not visible to the puppy (lure/signal)



3. Signal hand has no food in it and pup is rewarded from other hand as soon as it does the desired behavior. (Now the pup can be marked with “Nice!”)

Some puppies will not be ready for a pure signal (no food in hand) for many sessions after introduction of the lure.