



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Paw Pad Game #1

Introduction to the Paw Pad and “Stand” Position

See video link: https://youtu.be/v8EF_YmMrG8

Goal Behavior

The puppy places its front feet on the Paw Pad and maintains a stand position with intermittent reinforcement from the handler. This Paw Pad game reinforces “heel” position, i.e. the puppy standing in a straight line with its shoulder level with the handler’s leg. It also introduces duration, i.e. holding the desired position – in this case the stand. This helps teach the puppy self-control and prepares the pup for later introduction of a “stay” cue.



Training Session Objectives

Initial sessions introduce the puppy to placing its feet on the Paw Pad. Once the puppy willingly places its front paws on the pad, duration can be worked on.

Prerequisites

- The pup should know how to take food from the hand.
- The puppy should be hungry so practicing before meals is a good plan.
- It is preferable to start this game before the puppy has had a lot of work on the “sit” cue or it may become confused when working on the stand position.
- It is also less confusing to the puppy if Paw Pad Game #1 and #2 are well established before commencing the “Collar Cues” game. Should the collar cue game be started first, the puppy may be less likely to stay on the Paw Pad and may try to move with the handler’s “heel” position as the handler moves away.

Session Set Up

- A suitable Paw Pad (see instructions in document “Paw Pads – Suggestions and Guidelines”) should be set up in a quiet area.

- The training is preferably done off-leash in an area that is safe with no distractions. If the leash is attached, it should be loose and stepped upon so that the handler's hands are free. The leash should not be used to guide the puppy onto the Paw Pad.
- The bait bag will be most accessible if worn in the small of the handler's back; this allows for feeding with both hands.
- Practicing with a wall on the outside of the puppy will help keep the pup straight.
- The handler should stand facing forward with the Paw Pad on the left, positioned so that the front edge is approximately at the midline of the foot and touching or nearly touching the handler's foot. This will place the puppy with its front legs level with the seam of the handler's pants; the pup's ears should be about level with the handler's leg when on the pad, i.e. in "heel position."



Steps

Introduction to the Paw Pad

- With multiple pieces of food in the hand, the handler should lure the puppy onto the Paw Pad. The handler should feed kibbles one at a time in succession from the stash in that hand (i.e. "pezzing" see video reference)
- As the handler begins to run out of kibble, the feeding hand can be re-supplied by food from the other hand or the other hand can take over pezzing, whichever is more comfortable. The feeding hand should not be moved away from the puppy's muzzle in the initial session as the pup will likely move out of position to follow it.
- The handler should keep feeding to engage the pup and keep it in place on the Paw Pad.

Troubleshooting

- If the pup has its rear end out of line, its head should be lured to the outside (left) as it is fed, which should straighten up the puppy's body. If the pup is completely crooked it should be re-started by taking it off the pad and approaching again. The pup will maintain a straight position more easily if it is fed from the left hand straight in front of its nose.
- If the puppy sits, it should be lured back into a stand. For a puppy that tries to sit constantly, a higher Paw Pad will help keep it in a stand position.

After ten to fifteen pieces of kibble have been fed to the puppy, it should be gently picked up and placed behind the Paw Pad. The handler should lure the pup back onto the pad and repeat the above. The game may be repeated several times before ending the session, depending on the puppy's food interest and maturity. We want the pup to stay engaged and enjoy playing the game.

Next Step – Offering to Step onto the Pad

In the second or third session, which may be later that day or the next day, the handler should review the previous step once. Then rather than luring the puppy onto the pad, the handler can see if the puppy will offer to get onto the pad itself without being lured:

- The puppy should be placed a few inches behind the pad and the handler should wait to see if it will offer to step up onto the pad. If the pup does so, it should be marked with “Nice!” and rewarded.
- If the puppy does not actually step onto the pad it can still be marked for showing any interest or movement toward the pad. If every time the pup looks at or moves toward the pad it earns a reward, it will quickly learn that movement toward the pad pays off. This is called “shaping” a behavior. If the pup has a good history of being reinforced (rewarded) on the Paw Pad, in a very short time it will be offering the behavior of stepping onto the pad.
- If the puppy is still hesitant it may be lured onto the pad for a few more sessions.

Now the handler should gradually increase the amount of time between each kibble being offered. The puppy should still be “pezzed” but the hand offering the food should be pulled away quickly, immediately after giving a kibble, and held for a few seconds (or longer if the pup takes a long time to chew!) before returning to offer another kibble.

Dispensing with “Pezzing” (Third or Fourth Session)

The handler should start giving one kibble at a time, preferably with the left hand, from the bait bag or from the stash held in the other hand. Bringing the food from behind the handler’s back and offering it straight in front of the pup’s nose will help keep the puppy straight and prevent wrapping in front of the handler. *The pup should be rewarded straight ahead or even a little to the outside, not in front of the handler’s leg.* The puppy should be marked with “Nice!” before the handler reaches for the food to reward the puppy.

Increasing Duration

Every pup is different in how it will progress and the handler needs to gage the puppy to ascertain when it is appropriate to start increasing the time between rewards. Some puppies will calmly stand on the pad after one session and can quickly progress to waiting several seconds before receiving a kibble. Some puppies may need four or five sessions before they will have the patience and understanding to stand still, waiting for the food rewards.

The pup should now be given a high enough rate of reinforcement to keep it engaged, but not one kibble immediately after another, as when first playing the game. A second or two between kibbles should be gradually lengthened; progressing too quickly may confuse the puppy and result in it moving off the pad. Reinforcing the puppy randomly - sometimes after one second, sometimes after patiently waiting for three or four seconds – will keep the pup engaged in the game. The hand that delivers the food should return to a neutral position between rewards (hanging naturally at the handler’s side.)

Note: For now continue to mark and give a reward immediately when the puppy first steps up onto the pad.

After just a few days of working on this introduction the puppy should be ready to begin Paw Pad Game #2.