



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Paw Pad Game #2

Duration on the “Stand” Position

See video link: <https://youtu.be/O-eQQeLyFNE>

Goal Behavior

The puppy maintains a stand position on the Paw Pad with the handler moving out of position, away from the puppy. This helps teach the puppy self-control and introduces the beginning of a “stay” cue.



Training Session Objectives

Each session the handler moves a little more or slightly increases the distance between the handler and the puppy. Once the puppy is comfortable maintaining its position on the pad with the handler moving around, distance may be added.

Prerequisites

- The puppy should have had several sessions (or more depending on the puppy) on Paw Pad Game #1. Once the puppy is standing calmly on the pad for several seconds between marking and rewarding, the handler moving out of position may be introduced. Some puppies will be ready for this step after just a few sessions of Paw Pad Game #1; other puppies may need five or six sessions before adding the slightest handler movement.
- It is best to complete this game 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 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

Introducing Handler Movement

- Because another element is being added, i.e. handler movement, the puppy should be rewarded more frequently again (a higher rate of reinforcement) as when first starting Paw Pad Game #1. Having multiple pieces of food in each hand, ready to feed quickly with either hand, will keep the pup well reinforced for holding position. Reaching into the bait bag for a reward may delay the reward too much at this point, hence the need for holding kibbles in either hand.
- As the puppy stands on the pad, the handler should mark and reward with a piece of kibble. As the puppy is accepting/chewing on the food, the handler should take one small step forward with the right leg, slightly pivot on the left foot, and immediately come back to the original position, marking and rewarding at the same time. The movement should be so small as to be barely noticeable to the puppy.
- The small step should be repeated several times as above and then a larger step can be taken. Keeping the left leg next to the Paw Pad, and just pivoting on it, will be less distracting for the pup at first. A high rate of reinforcement is maintained as the handler is moving in and out of position.
- The handler can now pivot around to the front of the puppy, mark and reward with either hand, before quickly stepping back into position. This should be repeated several times.
- If the puppy is secure on the pad, the handler may take a small step backwards while facing the puppy, as the puppy is eating a kibble. The handler should mark "Nice!" and then step back toward the pup immediately to reward with either hand. If the puppy is secure on the pad this can be repeated several times.

Troubleshooting

- *If the puppy moves off the pad to follow the handler's movement, the handler should withhold the reward, become still and quiet then wait for the puppy to put its feet back on the pad.*
- *If the puppy does not offer to get back onto the pad, or is poorly positioned on the pad, the handler should wait for five seconds or so, with no reward and no interaction with the pup, before helping the puppy by luring it back into position on the pad.*
- *Subsequently the handler's movement should be much more subtle, perhaps just a weight shift at first, building up to a tiny pivot and quickly back to position. It is better to very gradually increase the handler movement, and have the puppy remain staying on the pad, than to confuse the puppy and have it move off the pad to follow the handler.*

- Depending upon the puppy, the handler may be able to move out to the front of the Paw Pad, a step away, in the first session, or it may take several sessions to build up to any distinct handler movement.
- The handler should not be in a hurry to increase the distance away from the puppy too soon; the puppy needs a strong reinforcement history for staying on the pad with the handler moving around close by. This way, the puppy will realize that so long as it keeps its feet on the pad, the reward will come to it. Later, as distance is increased, the puppy will be less likely to leave the pad to follow the handler if it knows it will always be rewarded on the pad.
- The handler can now stop holding multiple pieces of food in the hand and go back to reaching into the bag for each piece after marking.
- The time between rewards (duration) should be gradually increased while the handler is still close to the puppy. If the puppy starts moving off the pad or gets restless, the length of time it is being asked to stay before being rewarded is being built up too quickly.

Increasing Distance

Once the puppy is solid holding its position on the pad with the handler moving a step away to the front and side, with five seconds between rewards, distance can be added. Some puppies may be ready for this after four or five sessions of having the handler move around close to the pad, some puppies may need ten or twelve sessions to be calm and confident staying on the pad.

Because another element - distance - is being added, the puppy should be rewarded quickly again. It would be too difficult for the puppy to have the handler take several steps away for five seconds. Decreasing the time when adding distance helps the puppy be successful.

- The handler should start with a couple of repetitions of just taking one step away and stepping in quickly to reward the puppy after marking "Nice!"
- The handler can then step in front of the puppy as before, then take another step backwards away from the puppy, returning immediately to mark and reward in front of the puppy. This should be repeated several times.
- If the puppy is successful, the handler can take two or three steps backwards, immediately return to the puppy, mark and reward.
- The handler could also step off to the side several steps, immediately return, mark and reward. Care must be taken when going to the side that the puppy is holding position and not adjusting to better see the handler. If this happens, stepping off to the side must be done in much smaller increments.
- Distance away should be increased gradually. It may take several sessions of practice for the handler to be able to get six feet away from the puppy.
- Duration may be added slowly but it would not be fair to the puppy to increase distance away and increase the number of seconds between rewards at the same time. The handler should decrease the distance away from the puppy when building up time between rewards.
- At this point, if the handler is certain the puppy will stay on the pad, the verbal cue "Stay" may be given as the handler steps away. In positive training the cue is added after the behavior begins to take shape. (Think of the "Go To Bed" game.)

Moving the Pad Away from the Wall

Within a week of the handler increasing distance away from the puppy, the pad can be positioned gradually further away from the wall. Puppies can be weaned off the wall guide by moving the Paw Pad further away from the wall a few inches daily.