



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Retrieving Game

Retrieving games can benefit puppies in several ways:

- As an outlet for physical energy as well as providing mental stimulation for typically “busy-minded” puppies
- Confidence building for more sensitive puppies
- Bonding with the raiser through play
- A way to release any tension after outings/long days at work/school

Note: Raisers are not required to play this game with a puppy and some pups may not have any interest in playing the game – that’s OK! Some puppies don’t have much desire to retrieve and there are alternative games and activities it can enjoy.

Below are the guidelines to avoid potential injury and any detrimental impact on dogs preparing to enter formal guide training.

Appropriate Toys

Two types of toys are appropriate for this activity – a rubber stick or a soft retrieving bumper. By having special toys for the interactive retrieving games, that are put away when not being used for retrieving, the raiser will be able to control when the games start and end.

The toys listed below are lightweight (so shouldn’t cause damage if thrown inadvertently in the wrong direction!) and durable. These brands have been tested for durability; care should be taken if purchasing alternate brands. As with any toy, inspect for wear regularly. The cheaper brands of bumper tend to have the core material disintegrate and can be messy if the outer cover tears. The brands listed may be available on other websites.

Rubber Sticks

[Ruffwear Gnawt-a-Stick](#)

[Chuckit! Ultra Fetch Stick](#)

Soft Bumpers

[Ruffwear Lunker](#)

[Sport Dog Bumper](#)

[Chuckit! Bumper](#)

Set Up

- First games are played inside on a flat surface (no stairs) preferably in a carpeted hallway. Slippery floors should be avoided. A small yard space free of distractions may work well but avoid larger areas (making it harder to control the game) initially
- Ex-pens may be utilized to keep the space smaller at first
- Other household pets should be put elsewhere during the play session
- Time the games apart from meals so the puppy does not have a full stomach
- Two toys of the same type will be needed to “exchange” with the pup

Process

- Having a longline on the pup to help guide it back to the handler could be useful
- Start in an area of the home where the direction of the puppy is somewhat controlled. A hallway works well

- Allow the pup to engage in the toy to create interest; perhaps tug a little if the pup enjoys that game
- Hold pup by collar and wait until the toy lands to release the pup. This may inhibit the pup so throwing the toy and releasing the pup at the same time is OK at first. Once the puppy is keen to get the toy, controlling the pup until the toy has landed will decrease the possibility of the pup over-shooting and tumbling/hurting itself
- Toss the toy a short distance away encouraging the pup to go get the toy
- Raiser should stand still and encourage the puppy to return, or back away to draw the pup toward the raiser as in the FIR game. The handler should never move toward the toy. With less confident puppies sitting on the floor and encouraging the pup to climb into your lap with the toy will encourage the pup to “share”. It is essential that the less confident puppy be given plenty of time to hold the toy while being petted and praised before taking the toy from the pup or exchanging it for another toy
- The toy can be tied to a string to control the toy and create interest if needed (dragging it along the ground to awaken the chase instinct)
- When the puppy returns praise/pet and admire the pup before taking the toy from the puppy (very important at first to make the pup feel safe that you won't take the toy away)
- To encourage the pup to release, the toy can be exchanged for a kibble reward or exchanged with another identical toy (to encourage an “exchange” make the toy you are holding “come alive” by tapping it on the floor and teasing a little with it)
- A “Give” cue can be used as dog releases the toy (we are not using “That's Enough” until the end of the game to signal it is over and no more fetching fun is available!)
- Never chase a puppy to get the toy away from it as this may increase the potential for keep away
- Keep distances short and distractions to a minimum at first to encourage success!
- Once the pup has developed a solid foundation for the retrieving game it may be moved outside to a fenced area/yard
- Option: A pool with safe entry/exit can be used in the summer if available and enjoyed by the pup
- At the end of the session put the toy away in a location not accessible to the puppy

Communication

Contact your leader if:

- You note any concerning behaviors (growling, over-excitement, keep-away, etc.)
- The puppy becomes increasingly distracted by moving objects, kids' playing ball games etc
- The puppy is either not interested in the game or is not bringing the toy back/releasing it