



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Puppy Raising Department Ruff Notes – February 2018

Surviving Puppy Adolescence

What is it?

A transitional stage of physical and psychological development. Puppies may test boundaries, assert independence, become fearful, and/or gain more energy. The 'perfect puppy' may suddenly start to display new unwanted behaviors. Or, the pup that made progress suddenly reverts to problem behaviors from earlier in puppyhood.

When does it occur?

Varies, in our breeds may begin as early as six months or more usually around nine months. Lasts until the puppy reaches adulthood but early months are usually the most challenging.

What to expect?

- Increased energy may lead to:
 - Destructive chewing
 - Leash pulling
 - Excitable behaviors – greetings, house manners, etc.
 - Demand behaviors – barking, attention-seeking
- Increased independence may lead to:
 - Keep-away or slow response to FIR
 - Lack of attention – dog, people, odor, scavenging and/or general distraction
- Increased awareness may lead to:
 - Wariness of environment, people, dogs, odors, surfaces and/or sounds

How to manage the adolescent pup?

- Continue socializing in new places throughout puppyhood and puberty; adolescents need challenges to avoid boredom (raisers with puppies going through a fear period at this time may be advised to give them a break from socialization and keep them home)
- Increase exercise, as needed
- Provide mental stimulation
 - More challenging outings, as appropriate
 - Increase expectations for cued skills (stays, foundation position changes, collar cues, etc.) - several intense training sessions per day will tire the adolescent brain
 - Rotate toys

*As of August 2020, stuffed Kongs and Wobblers may be used with leader approval. Raisers should note this in each relevant monthly report and review the guidelines found here: [Food Containing Toys: Stuffed Kong and Wobbler](#).

- Back to basics at home
 - Reduce freedom/increase supervision

- utilize baby gates, tie down, crate and long-line, as needed
- Gradually re-expose to distracting situations
 - Utilize increased frequency of food rewards
 - Utilize increase value of food reward (with CFR approval)
 - Utilize Gentle Leader; pups that had graduated out of the GL may need to go back to it for a while
- If needed for confidence, incorporate desensitization and counter-conditioning as outlined in our 'Building a Confident Puppy with R+' document

Summary

Being prepared for adolescence will help reduce frustration and achieve success during these challenging months. Be aware and understand that this is a normal part of canine development requiring patience and consistency on the part of the raiser. Puberty is temporary, a phase, but it is of utmost importance to address any unwanted behaviors that may occur. A guide dog puppy's potential may be ruined by poor habits allowed to form during this period. Raisers may need extra guidance and support at this time. Frequent puppy sitting by more experienced handlers can give the raiser a much-needed break and add to the puppy's adaptability. Occasionally the developing puppy proves to be too much of a challenge at this time and a transfer to a stronger raiser may be warranted. Contact your CFR for support and ideas to best develop our 'teenage' puppies!