



# Guide Dogs for the Blind

## Food Reward Games

### *Puppy's Introduction to Polite Food Reward Taking*



**Goals of the Games:** Puppy learns to accept delivered food reward in a gentle manner that is comfortable to the handler and remain in place while food is being delivered.

**How Handler Delivers Food:** Directly to the puppy's mouth. Single kibble is held: under thumb against flat fingers, or with thumb and index finger, or held cupped in palm of a hand. Every food delivery should be very direct to the puppy's mouth to ensure the puppy does not feel the need to move its mouth to the food. The puppy will be more likely to be gentle in taking food if it never experiences moving toward the food during delivery.

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#### GAME 1

##### **Game Preparation**

Puppy contained via leash or small area in a low distraction environment. Game can be played at a regular mealtime and puppy's entire meal can be fed by hand. Handler may desire to begin GAME 1 by sitting on a stool to be more comfortable. Sitting on the floor is not recommended as it will encourage the puppy to climb on the handler.

##### **Step 1 - Getting Started – The First Food Offering by Hand**

Cup both hands together, forming a "hand bowl", with several kibbles in the "hands". Allow puppy to eat several kibbles, holding hands about 6 inches off the floor. Using two hands helps prevent kibble from dropping onto the floor.

##### **Step 2 – Single kibble delivered by one hand to puppy's mouth**

While the puppy busy eating, gradually transfer kibbles into one "hand bowl" so you have a free hand to begin delivering single rewards. While puppy is eating from the "single hand bowl", use the free hand to deliver single rewards directly to the puppy's mouth, gradually raising the hand holding the kibbles higher and out of the puppy's reach. Maintain a constant rhythm of delivery preventing the puppy from feeling the need to try and get to the hand holding all the kibbles. This means the puppy is barely finished eating a single reward before another one is delivered. This prevents the puppy from having any reason to try and move towards the source of kibble.

Deliver directly to the puppy's mouth, avoiding any reflex by the puppy to raise its front feet off the floor to get the delivered kibble. Once the puppy appears to be basically still and accepting rewards as they are delivered, progress to the next step.

### **Step 3 – Expand the time between food deliveries**

Allow the puppy to finish one reward before starting to deliver the next reward. This gives the puppy a moment to think about moving towards where the food is coming from. Deliver the next reward just before the puppy moves towards the rewards. This builds the puppy's trust that staying in place results in food being delivered.

If the puppy does move towards the food, immediately raise it high and out of reach. Ignore the jumping but the moment the puppy's feet are back on the floor, deliver a reward directly to the puppy. This is teaching the puppy that rewards only come when four paws are on the floor.

At this early stage, avoid waiting through several attempts from the puppy to get at the food. Strive to get the reward directly to the puppy's mouth the moment the front paws are back on the floor. The puppy will realize that jumping or pawing for the reward makes it disappear but staying patiently on the ground with all four feet will be rewarded.

As the puppy demonstrates patience, the handler can stand fully erect which will further expand the time between food deliveries.

### **End of the GAME 1 Goal**

Puppy remains with all paws on the floor while single food rewards are delivered with a few seconds between each food delivery. This can usually be accomplished during 1 or 2 mealtime feedings by hand.

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## **GAME 2**

### **Step 1 - Game Warm up**

Review how patience is rewarded by giving a few single food rewards delivered with a few seconds between rewards. Review GAME 1 further if the puppy is not showing an understanding.

### **Step 2 - Introducing “DOGGIE ZEN”**

Close your hand, into a fist, over a single food reward and place it directly at the puppy's mouth. Allow the puppy to attempt to get the food by mouthing or pawing. The first moment the puppy stops trying to get the reward, open the hand and deliver it to the puppy's mouth.

The idea is for the pup to realize that if they stop trying to get the food, the food will come to them. Strive to react quickly, when the puppy has a brief moment of not trying for the food. After a few well timed repetitions, the puppy will quickly get the idea.

If the puppy immediately goes frantically at the food hand, without any chance of a moment of stillness, quickly remove the hand from the puppies reach (high in the air) and the moment the puppy is still, deliver the reward. Repeat this several times, focusing on quick delivery at the moment of stillness from the puppy. At this stage, only hold the reward in the closed hand for one or two seconds before delivering the reward.

### **Step 3 – Puppy demonstrates “DOGGIE ZEN”**

Repeat this game until the puppy does not attempt to take the food when the closed hand is presented at their mouth. When the puppy is consistent, expand the time the closed hand is held at the puppy's mouth to 2 or 3 seconds (no more) before opening the hand and delivering the food.

Always deliver the food reward when playing this game.

### **End of the GAME 2 Goal**

Food in the closed hand can be held at the puppy's mouth for 2 to 3 seconds without puppy trying to get the food. The reward is then delivered to the puppy. Puppy no longer attempts to get the reward when the closed hand is presented in front of their mouth.

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## GAME 3

### Step 1 - Game Warm up

Review “DOGGIE ZEN” to be sure the puppy understands how to be patient in order to get the closed hand to open and deliver the food reward.

### Step 2 – Extreme “DOGGIE ZEN”

Present the closed hand with a kibble further away from the puppy’s mouth (1 to 2 feet distance /at the level of the pup’s mouth). Shorten the amount of time to one second before delivering the food reward.

Note: This means that the handler (upon deciding to deliver) must quickly move the hand to the puppy’s mouth to prevent the puppy from moving forward when the delivery begins.

Repeat the exercise and expand the time to two to three seconds of patience before direct delivery to the puppy’s mouth. Hand is still closed over the food reward and presented about 1 to 2 feet in front of the puppy. If the puppy is energetically working at the hand closed over the food, suddenly withdraw the hand out of reach. Quickly deliver the food when the puppy waits. When withdrawing the hand to deny access, it should be high into the air, clearly out of reach to the puppy. When removing the food hand, wait two – three seconds, then present hand again in the same position.

**Note:** GAME 1 and GAME 2 have prepared the puppy for understanding that patience pays off. If a puppy is having trouble with this step, go back to Game 2 for several repetitions prior to trying Game 3 again.

*Historically, Extreme “DOGGIE ZEN” progressed to ignoring food from an open hand. With the use of luring techniques, we are instead teaching puppies to follow food when presented in an open hand.*

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## PROBLEM SOLVING *Techniques for Persistent Mouthing / Roughness on Hands*

### Preferred Problem Solving Method: Delivery Technique

Offer food with flat hand, kibble tucked under thumb against palm of hand with fingers pointing downward. Use contact with fingertips under the dog’s chin to lift the dog’s chin (thinking of lifting the nose towards the sky) as kibble is released into the mouth. To access the kibble the puppy will need to lick the food from under your thumb. When you feel his tongue, release the food to him.



This delivery technique has been very successful with many puppies and adult dogs. If you feel it is not working, contact your leader for assistance in your skills with the technique.

### Alternative Problem Solving Methods

- During each delivery, push the reward into the puppy’s mouth, accentuating there is no need for the puppy to push their mouth towards the reward during delivery.
- Removal of food hand at the first moment of roughness

At the moment you feel roughness, quickly jerk the food hand away from the puppy and out of sight (behind your back). You may also vocalize “Ouch”! at the moment of roughness, as you remove the food hand. Wait 3-5 seconds, then present hand again. Deliver the reward during gentle behavior.