



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Puppy Raising Department Ruff Notes – October 2018

Relieving Review

Please review the document on relieving and housebreaking in the manual:

<https://www.guidedogs.com/uploads/files/Puppy-Raising-Manual/Relieving-and-Housebreaking.pdf>

Some questions have come up in recent months regarding relieving surfaces and method of relieving on leash. After discussions in our Training and Behavior Standards Workgroup (comprised of senior staff in both Puppy Raising and the Training Department) we decided to try to clarify some areas of the relieving protocol for our raisers.

Relieving Surfaces

It has been noted by some volunteers visiting campus that training staff are relieving dogs on grass. We ask raisers to teach their pups to relieve on hard surfaces and avoid grass if at all possible. The instances where dogs are relieved on grass on campus may be:

- During construction when normal hard-surface relieving areas are not available for use
- During unusually hot weather when hard top is uncomfortably warm for the dogs
- When a dog has a veterinary issue and it needs to be relieved as quickly and comfortably as possible

We became aware that some campus volunteers were relieving dogs on grass or other vegetation before walking them; we are providing education for them on our relieving protocols to help them understand the importance of maintaining hard-surface relieving.

We all want our dogs to be successful and appreciate the hard work that our puppy raisers put into teaching puppies to relieve on hard surfaces. Recognizing that the pups' relieving behavior can be compromised by allowing them to relieve on grass regularly is part of education for all our volunteers. Please remind raisers that continuing to relieve pups on hard top or cement is the best way to keep up good habits in the puppy. Dirt, bark and gravel are not substitutes for teaching relieving on hard top and cement and should only be used if the choice is between these surfaces or grass.

Handling When Relieving

There has recently been some confusion about the method of relieving; some handlers cast the dog to relieve in front of the handler and some pivot in place with the dog circling the handler. We prefer that raisers use the former method however pivoting may be used if the raiser ensures that the dog remains in front of the handler when relieving. The Training Department will use both methods depending on the environment and the dog. For a client, it is sometimes inconvenient to use one or the other method (a client would not pivot but would stand in place and pass the leash behind; not something we want raisers doing with puppies as it risks teaching the pup that it's OK to relieve on the left in heel position.)

We advise that raisers teach the puppy to relieve in front of the handler as it is easier to add circling the handler later; if the pup is only taught circling to begin with, it will be much more difficult to get the pup to relieve in front of the handler.

Here are the guidelines on introducing the pup to leash relieving from the manual:

- As the puppy reaches the relieving area, the handler gives the puppy a release cue of “OK” and casts the puppy out in front of the handler.
- The puppy should be allowed to sniff the ground and may be encouraged to move back and forth, or in a circular pattern, in front of the handler to promote relieving.
- The handler may pivot in the center if necessary, however, the handler should remain facing the pup as it circles, teaching the pup to relieve in front of the handler. Preventing a puppy from relieving on the handler’s left side may help it understand that it is not desirable to relieve in heel position.
- The handler should not follow the puppy if it attempts to move to fresh ground; this will encourage the puppy to explore instead of focusing on the task at hand
- A six-foot radius around the handler should be sufficient for the puppy to relieve in.
- If the puppy is reluctant to move, the handler may take several steps forward and backwards or side to side, while encouraging the puppy to keep moving and stay engaged in the activity.
- The moment the puppy begins to relieve, the handler should add the cue “Do Your Business” repeating as the puppy relieves. As the pup finishes relieving the handler may choose to mark the behavior and use a food reward as soon as the pup returns from the squat to a normal position.

Here are some great tips from a document we put out several years ago:

Relieving Q&A

Why is it considered an accident if the puppy indicates the need to relieve if I can make him wait for a moment?

A graduate needs to have a dog that will take a given opportunity to relieve when a proper relieving area or “doggie bathroom” is presented. The grad of course will adjust to the dog’s biological need but is imperative that he has a dog that is on a dependable schedule and utilizes scheduled “coffee breaks” to take care of business. It becomes a work disruption for a dog to relieve or ask to relieve when working just as it is a disruption in a classroom setting for a student to excuse himself to use the restroom just after recess!

Why shouldn’t I let the puppy tell me when he needs to go outside?

When first housebreaking the puppy, he will need to be taken out frequently to relieve due to his bladder and bowel immaturity. As his body matures, these opportunities will become less frequent. The goal is to teach the puppy to wait until he is given an opportunity and that he needs to relieve each time he is given that opportunity. Too frequent relieving opportunities leads to a pup not “producing” when offered. Regularly scheduled relieving opportunities, becoming less frequent as he matures, are highly preferred. All growing pups are at risk of occasional digestive upsets; these and diet changes can cause them to occasionally be off-schedule. It is OK to respond to the dog subtly asking/signaling to go out (no ringing of bells, barking or other prompts please) but make sure he really needs to relieve and is not just wanting a change of scenery!

If I am on a two-mile hike, is it okay for me to give the puppy a relieving opportunity?

Guide work can involve a lot of walking and we need to prepare puppies for this. The puppy should be relieved at home first so he will be “empty” and not need to relieve on the hike or any walk for that matter. We do not want to pattern dogs to be exercise-induced relievers. I suspect most handlers do not stop to relieve themselves on a hike but likely take care of business before setting out! If the pup cannot walk two miles

without relieving then take him for shorter walks and don't attempt a distance beyond the level to which he is gradually trained to hold himself.

If the puppy relieves on walks, how am I supposed to exercise him if I was told not to take him on walks until he is accident free?

Puppies pattern behavior very quickly. If the pup has a pattern of relieving on walks, refrain from walks while the relieving process is retrained and set the puppy up for success. During this period of "house arrest" the pup is given the chance to successfully relearn doing his business when asked, without confusion.

After he has been relieved appropriately in the designated relieving spot, play tug or offer an opportunity to play with a Jolly Ball to help satisfy his exercise needs. The raiser may need to get creative in finding alternatives to the neighborhood walks; however it is very important for the puppy not be put in a situation where he will fail and have another accident while he is establishing new habits. Remember that house arrest is not meant to be punitive or long-term but rather an opportunity to relearn proper relieving habits. Walks can be gradually re-introduced once good relieving habits are established.

I really don't want the puppy to have an accident but I am worried he will go in a store, why can't I relieve him prior to going inside?

The primary "doggie bathroom" should be at home. He should be relieved prior to leaving home. Raisers who offer an opportunity to relieve each time before going into a store, may be asking the puppy to relieve over-frequently. Too-frequent relieving opportunities leads to the puppy not "producing" when offered, and consequently, poor relieving habits. If the puppy is immature and may have an accident in a business, take him fewer places until he is ready to hold himself longer. Having an additional handler who can just wait at the store entrance with the puppy, while the raiser shops, for example, is still good socialization and avoids risk of accidents.

The puppy urinated on an outing but he wasn't wearing his jacket. If he isn't "on duty" why is that an accident?

Pups need to learn to only relieve when given the cue "Do Your Business". The fact that a puppy is not in jacket does not mean he can relieve at will. Remember the jacket only identifies the puppy to the public and should not be used as a deterrent for poor behavior. Good manners are the same 24/7: no relieving without permission, no mouthy behavior, no jumping on people etc. whether or not the puppy has a jacket on!

If I don't take the puppy out because I am afraid he will have an accident, how is he supposed to get socialized?

Socialization is a slow process. Once fully relieved at home, the puppy is free to go out and about as dictated by his readiness for socialization. Over-socialization creates many relieving issues and puts a puppy in a situation that he may not be ready for.

The puppy takes forever to poop, how long should I give him to go before I just put him in a crate?

We recommend 3-5 minutes maximum. If the puppy were not distracted we would expect him to relieve within the first minute or so. The key is to keep him sniffing and circling – if the puppy is standing and staring off into space no amount of time will get him to relieve. Puppies that don't relieve should be put back into the crate (where they can't have an accident) and given another relieving opportunity later. Keeping a relieving log can really help clarify the pup's relieving patterns and provides the information needed to help him build good habits.

The puppy will go on grass easily so that is what I use when I am out and about, why is that not desirable?

Many graduates need to relieve their dogs on hard surfaces while at work or traveling. It can be difficult to find a grassy spot each time the guide needs to be relieved. Puppies enter raiser homes being most familiar with

relieving on cement. It is much easier to just maintain this pattern; once puppies get used to relieving on grass they can become pickier about their relieving surface. When the dogs return for training they are relieved on cement so it helps them to maintain that familiarity throughout puppyhood.

The puppy pees every time I take him out; sometimes it is only a quarter size puddle. Is this what my aim should be?

It's good that the puppy understands what is asked of him. However, the puppy may be receiving too many relieving opportunities and he needs to learn to hold himself for longer periods.

At what age should I expect the puppy to be accident free?

Puppies should have no more accidents after they are fully housebroken (usually by 4-5 months.) Once housebroken any more than one or two accidents constitutes a relieving problem and the leader should be consulted immediately before the bad habit becomes entrenched. Remember preventing accidents is the key!

The puppy often relieves while playing off-leash in the yard – is this an “accident”?

Technically no, it's not an accident if the pup relieves when free-running in the yard. However, if this is happening routinely and interfering with scheduled on-leash relieving opportunities, raisers might want to consider only free-running the pup after it has taken advantage of offered on-leash relieving and is “empty”. If the pup is producing “extra” when free-running, and has no other relieving issues, don't worry about it.