



Guide Dogs for the Blind Puppy Raising Department Ruff Notes – November 2020

Puppy Socialization during COVID-19

Socializing young puppies is one of the most important tasks that puppy raisers do in preparing GDB dogs to be successful guides, breeders, and K9 Buddies. Many of us have spent more time at home than usual with shelter-in-place, which has changed some of the ways that we initially socialize puppies. Where many raisers might take a puppy to a public place or attend puppy club meetings, this is not always possible with current safety measures set in place by GDB and state/local ordinances. Keeping safety in mind, we have created a list of alternate ways to socialize puppies in the home and in public.

We want each socialization experience to be positive and fun for the puppy. If you notice the puppy you are raising showing signs of fear (refusing food, cowering, barking, hackling, hiding, etc.) please reach out to your club leader for further support. For more information on reporting negative behaviors, please see the [Ruff Notes from May 2019](#).

In-home Socialization

- **Audio Socialization:** Think about all of the many sounds that we might encounter in a given day - traffic, birds, construction, doorbells/knocking on doors, children playing, etc. Although we may be limited with having puppies hear these sounds in public, we can find many of these sounds on YouTube! Start by playing the sound at a low level while feeding the puppy. Slowly, over multiple training sessions, increase the volume. We want the puppy to feel confident around these noises. Try selecting noises that are not common to your home environment. This may include but is not limited to construction noise, yard equipment, sirens, garbage trucks, etc.

Below are a series of sounds you can play for the puppy you are raising:

- <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-oTvwFvwH33-BIEjpZdXrslu3J6KxjFH>
- <https://www.dogwise.com/sound-socialization-audio-updated-2019-digital-download-mp3/>
- **Surface Socialization:** In the “real world”, puppies will encounter many different kinds of surfaces. It's important that GDB pups are confident and willing to walk on various surfaces. At home, we can simulate many of these surfaces with common household items! Remember, when introducing puppies to new surfaces, we want to use lots of food and praise. You'll want to mark and reward when the puppy approaches and is standing on the surface. To start, use a towel or blanket to cover the surface. Once the puppy is comfortable, you can roll or fold the blanket/ towel to reduce the covered surface area. Mark and reward the puppy when their feet are touching the exposed surface. After a few sessions, the puppy can try walking over the surface without a covering. Here are examples of household items that make interesting new surfaces:
 - Cookie cooling rack
 - Wire crate kennel separator
 - Tarp
 - X-pen laid out
 - Wet grass or cement (hose it down!)

- **People Socialization:** While working, guide dogs encounter all kinds of people, so having a confident dog that is willing to walk past a distracting person is really important. To help socialize puppies, try having a household member dress up in different types of clothes or costumes. Some examples of this include wearing scrubs, face covering/mask, hoodie (with the hood up), trench coat, Halloween costumes, uniforms and much more. Start with the puppy from a distance, mark and reward when the pup is calmly looking at the person who is dressed up. As the person approaches, you may need to increase the rate of food rewards. If the puppy is comfortable and calm, they can greet the person with the “ok” release word. You can also take advantage of people in your neighborhood such as gardeners, postal workers, and garbage collectors, keeping in mind social distancing and face coverings. Consider introducing the puppy to moving people on bikes and skateboards from an appropriate distance to ensure the puppy is successful. To add an additional challenge, try working on this at varied times of day and locations. For example in the day vs. at night or inside the home vs. in the driveway.
- **Mock Vet Visit:** At GDB, we want our puppies to be calm and comfortable when visiting a veterinary clinic and when being handled by veterinary staff. At home, you can set-up a mock veterinary visit by placing a towel on a table and having someone wearing a mask (and scrubs if you have them!) pick-up the puppy and proceed with body handling. At vet clinics, puppies are looked at from the tip of their nose to the tip of their tail. It’s important to practice touching their paws, feeling down their spine to the tip of their tail, looking in their ears, eyes, and mouth, along with practicing the layover. Use lots of food and praise to ensure this is a positive experience for the puppy.
- **At-home Dining Experiences:** Restaurant socialization is an important part of puppy raising and one that has been particularly difficult during shelter-in-place. Creating a restaurant-like atmosphere in the home can be a fun and convenient way to socialize puppies. Try placing a table outside in the yard or driveway, having tablecloths on the table, and practice settling/kenneling under the table similarly to a restaurant environment. If you have other people living in the home, you can have them act as a server and deliver food and drinks, too! Food debris on the floor can also be utilized with puppies at an appropriate distance for their age and temperament.
- **Object Show and Tell:** Simple household items can be new and exciting things to puppies when put in unusual places or when experiencing them for the first time. Start by placing household items in a familiar room and allow the puppy to sniff and investigate the item. If the puppy seems comfortable, you can do easy, loose leash walking exercises or obedience around the item. If the item is a bit more challenging, utilize distance and pezzing to create a positive experience. Here are some examples of objects that you can introduce to the puppy:
 - Flags
 - Vacuum cleaner
 - Hair dryer
 - Holiday decorations

Public Socialization

- **Car Trips:** Car trips are an easy and fun way to socialize puppies to different sounds, smells, and sights that they will experience as they grow. Depending on the area that you live in, puppies may have the opportunity to experience a wide variety of sights and sounds within a relatively short drive and from the safety of the vehicle. Start by driving to a quieter area and let the puppy hear, smell, and see the area while feeding. If safe, have the puppies out of the car experiencing the environment. Start with short, quiet trips, and work up to busier areas. Some opportunities might include:
 - Grocery store parking lot
 - Neighborhood park
 - Neighborhood walks (near home or in a new area)
 - A coastal area or nature preserve
 - Echo-y parking garage

- Bus or train station
- Stables or farm
- Dog park (staying in vehicle at a distance)

In this time of constant changes, we appreciate your willingness and dedication with finding creative ways of socializing our puppies! If you have any other ideas for puppy socialization, don't hesitate to share them with your club leader. Additionally, if you happen to take any cute pictures of the puppy you are raising participating in any of the socialization ideas we've listed here, we'd love to see them! You can tag us in your pictures on social media and use the hashtag [#GDBPuppyExplorers](#)