



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Human-only Training Games

No puppy necessary!

Marking and rewarding puppies for good behavior may sound easy, but it can feel a little like patting your head and rubbing your belly at the same time until it becomes muscle memory. If you're skeptical that day will ever come, fortunately we can speed up the process, and practice the individual pieces – even without a puppy! A solid foundation of the mechanical skills required in handling food rewards and marking behavior can be developed through some human-only games. Goofiness, and convincing family members to animate your “fake dog” is encouraged.

Just like breaking down behavior for puppies, we as handlers can practice each piece individually, and put them all together at the end. This document describes some of the activities that can be practiced with only a few household props.

What you'll need

- Some kibble (or anything of a similar size/shape). Good alternatives for use in these human-only exercises can include flat marbles, candies (M&Ms, Skittles, etc.), or similar sized pebbles.
- A “mouth” to deliver to. While working on your own technique, it's actually better to do this without a puppy! Stuffed animals or even a cup on its side will suffice.
- A bait bag. We recommend something with a nice wide opening for those with adult-sized hands! Something that easily opens and shuts with one hand (hinge clasp or magnet) is also highly recommended. A small purse or even a homemade bag will work in a pinch. If you don't have access to anything that will work as a bait bag you can still do some of the exercises with the “kibble” in a bowl on the counter.
- A leash (or other rope you have lying around the house)

A quick reminder: if a GDB puppy is in the same room while you are playing these games, they might be confused the first couple times you mark and feed a cup. This is completely normal, and you do NOT need to give a kibble to the puppy each time someone in the room says “nice”. It is important for puppies to learn that the marker is not always directed at them, even when said by someone who rewarded them in the past. It also helps pups transition to other situations where another dog might be earning food rewards nearby (such as when instructors work multiple dogs on campus), but they are still expected to relax calmly until it is their turn! Put the “real” puppy on a tie down/in a crate/in an x-pen and reward occasionally for calm behavior as you practice.



Loose Leash Walking

1) Delivering single pieces of kibble from the bait bag to the “puppy” standing at your left-hand side

Review [Loose Leash Walking](#) for a reminder on bait bag position and food reward location.

Sample video: <https://youtu.be/Lp18Lx6uMEY>

Tips:

- Reach into the bait bag and take out a SINGLE piece of kibble to deliver. No hoarding a handful! Your hands should be empty in between each delivery.
- Try to keep your feet/body facing forward, and not turning toward the puppy.
- Present the kibble all the way to the puppy’s mouth. No hesitation, no tossing.
- Don’t forget to shut the bait bag after you deliver the kibble.
- Practice with both hands! Aim to be equally comfortable delivering kibble with both your left and right hands. **We strongly encourage the use of left-hand food delivery to avoid puppies curling in front of the handler.** That said, your left hand may sometimes be otherwise occupied (such as holding the leash short around challenging distractions) and it is useful to be confident delivering kibble from either hand.

2) Add in the marker word!

Sample video: <https://youtu.be/l8En8Tef9Tg>

Tips:

- Say “nice!” BEFORE you make any moves to reach for the bait bag.
- Keep your marker short, crisp, and sounding the same each time.
- You must deliver a kibble each time you mark

3) Add a leash (or other leash-like prop) and practice left-hand food delivery

Hold the leash as you normally, naturally would (hint: most people tend to hold the leash in their left hand – or hold with both). AFTER you mark, adjust your leash hold so you can reach for a piece of kibble with your left hand.

Tips: Some people find it easier to pass the leash to the right hand in front of their body (“front cross”) and some prefer to pass the leash behind their body (“rear cross”).

Sample video of both techniques:

“Front cross” Left Hand Food Delivery: <https://youtu.be/eDTwSAxKAbQ>

“Rear cross” Left Hand Food Delivery: <https://youtu.be/VpYUjB74Wq4>

4) Add in movement

Don’t forget that food rewards are delivered after both handler and puppy have stopped ([Loose Leash Walking](#)).

Tips:

- This activity might be easier with a helpful assistant to hold the fake puppy to keep it in Loose Leash Walking position.
- Mark for movement (i.e. *while* you’re walking), then stop, and deliver the kibble.
- Gradually come to a stop, taking a few steps to do so. If you stop too suddenly the puppy might “overshoot”.

Videos:

- Loose Leash Walking Left Hand Delivery (preferred in most instances):

- Front cross: <https://youtu.be/TEQwzXbujz4>
- Rear cross: <https://youtu.be/X05R6ivQ6DQ>
- Loose Leash Walking Right Hand Delivery: <https://youtu.be/n5jiSi7afxw>

Pezzing

Practice the hand mechanics for continuous food delivery (i.e. “pezzing”). Pezzing is often useful when puppies need a high rate of reinforcement to hold a position (e.g. when first learning about the [Paw Pad](#)), and for the [Emergency Lure](#).

- 1) Continuously delivering individual pieces of kibble from a handful held in your right hand**
Practice using your thumb to slide a single kibble forward to the puppy, while keeping the rest of the kibble hidden in your fist. This can take some finger dexterity!
Sample video: <https://youtu.be/szyLCYml73c>
- 2) Deliver a stream of kibbles to the “puppy” on your left side**
Again, try to keep your feet/body facing forward, and not turning toward the puppy.
Sample video: <https://youtu.be/TcOcjKJl9hl>
- 3) Add in movement**
Practice pezzing kibble while walking quickly, as you would in the [Emergency Lure](#).
Sample video: <https://youtu.be/JL8GjGx5W6c>
- 4) EXTRA (optional) CHALLENGE: Repeat Steps 1-3 with your left hand!**
Sample video: <https://youtu.be/MY0sCarQiXY>

Marker timing

Grab a partner, or better yet, the whole family! Have one person bounce a ball, and the goal is for the handler(s) to mark and reward for the exact instant the ball hits the ground.

- 1) Mark exactly when the ball hits the ground**
At first this can be done without delivering kibble, so handlers can focus on just getting the marker timing exactly right.
- 2) Add in reaching for the food and delivering a single piece of kibble**
Make sure all hands, arms, feet, and legs stay in neutral, relaxed position until *after* the mark!
Sample video: https://youtu.be/PA_NVc3_o2A
- 3) Make the game more challenging!** This game also works asking the ball-handler to toss the ball upwards and having the handler mark when the ball reaches the highest point. OR choose a completely different behavior to mark and reward. Get creative!

Shaping (aka “Hot/Cold”) – Human-only game

“Shaping” is a fancy name for the practice of breaking down complex behaviors into smaller, easier pieces and building those smaller pieces together until you have “shaped” the goal behavior. You can practice the art of developing a training plan by shaping a human partner to do silly things like “rub your nose” or “sit in a chair

and cross your legs” or “sweep the floor” (am I dreaming...?). Take advantage of your human training partner and get some feedback from them after the game to see what went well and what could have been clearer!

Additional Human Shaping Game resources and ideas:

- <https://boogiebt.com/2018/06/17/behavior-shaping-game-for-humans/>
- <https://www.artandscienceofanimaltraining.org/tools/portl-shaping-game/>

Have an idea? We’d love to hear it! If you have other ideas for fun, human-only training games to hone those GDB puppy handling skills, please share them with your leader/CFR and they might show up in this document or at your next club meeting!