

GUIDE  
DOGS



# Guide Dogs' Puppy Development and Advice Leaflet

## No. 3 Relief routines



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## Teaching relief behaviour and routines to guide dog puppies

Although it is potentially one of the more unpleasant aspects of working with and training dogs, we must consider and deal with our dogs' natural behaviours of urination and defecation. Despite this being a necessary bodily function, we can educate our dogs to defecate and urinate within appropriate routines and locations, in order to reduce health risks, inconvenience and embarrassment for guide dog owners. There are many words for the acts of urination and defecation, but in this document we shall refer to them as 'spending' or the dog 'relieving' itself.

By the end of guide dog training, it is our aim that all potential working guide dogs are: 'clean in the house and when working in harness, within an understandable and achievable relief routine. All dogs should spend to the specific prompt "busy-busy" on the surface (this is frequently concrete) required by the intended owner either on or off the lead.'

**As puppy walking is the initial training phase for all our dogs, it is crucial that we begin to develop our puppies' relief routines to achieve this ultimate goal. In order to help you achieve this we have broken the subject down into four areas to make the task easier to tackle. Our aim is to ensure the following by the end of the puppy walking period:**

- that the puppy has a good understanding of the "busy-busy" prompt and is relaxed when it is used in all environments including in front of the handler
- that the puppy is clean in the house
- that the puppy is clean when walking (i.e. it does not spend when out socialising, unless asked to by the handler)
- that the puppy is comfortable with relieving itself on different surfaces, on or off a lead

Achieving all of these aims will take a great deal of time, patience and consistency from everyone handling your puppy.

The following advice will help you to educate your puppy correctly so that gradually your puppy understands how, where and when it should relieve itself.

However, as your puppy matures it is likely that routines will change and 'little accidents' will occur (e.g. when changing from four feeds to three). This is perfectly normal, so please do not become frustrated or reprimand your puppy if sometimes your puppy seems to be taking 'one step forward and two back'. Please contact your supervisor to discuss any concerns that you may have.

### The "busy-busy" prompt

The words "busy-busy" are used by all puppy walkers, staff and ultimately guide dog owners to encourage our dogs to relieve themselves. With everyone using the same command, we can improve the puppy's understanding and therefore reduce confusion and concern. The tone in which this prompt is used is generally light and positive. The two syllables in each word ensure the sound is longer than usual obedience commands and is therefore perceived as pleasant. It is important to remember that the same command is used to encourage both urination and defecation.

**We teach our puppies to spend when prompted to help establish appropriate spending routines and therefore to ensure that spending does not occur in social environments or on walks. Both situations could cause a guide dog owner a great deal of difficulty and/or embarrassment.**

## So how do you teach your puppy to respond to the “busy-busy” prompt?

There are generally three stages to teaching your puppy to spend when prompted.

### Stage 1

**This involves linking the words “busy-busy” to the action of spending. This process starts from the moment you receive your puppy (in fact, the process will have been started already by the person who has raised the puppy for the first six/seven weeks).**

To continue this, wait for opportunities when your puppy naturally relieves itself and simply say “busy-busy” as the puppy begins to spend, thereby associating the prompt with the action. Use of a soft, encouraging tone and give praise when the puppy has finished, ensuring the whole experience is a positive one.

This should continue for between two and three weeks, every time the puppy spends under supervision. The more it happens, and the puppy is praised, the faster the puppy will learn.

### Stage 2

**This involves slightly altering the timing of the “busy-busy” prompt to coincide with the period just before your puppy spends.**

Over the first two or three weeks you will have noted that your puppy’s behaviour changes before it relieves itself – some puppies start to move around in circles or sniff the ground persistently, others may give a little whimper.

During relief opportunities, look for these signals. When confident that your puppy is going to relieve itself, gently prompt the relief by saying “busy-busy”, as before. Hopefully, your puppy will hear the command as it is intending to spend and, with the understanding gained during stage 1, will be aware of what is required and feel more relaxed as a result. Once the puppy has finished, reward with praise so that the behaviour will occur again next time. Stage 2 should continue for at least six weeks to ensure the link between the prompt and the action has been firmly and positively established.

### Stage 3

**Once the puppy has a good association between the words “busy-busy” and spending, you can then begin to encourage your puppy to spend on request. Unlike the previous stages, where the prompt has been given as, or when, the puppy is going to relieve itself anyway, we can now ask for the response before the action occurs.**

However, it is important initially not to use “busy-busy” outside the puppy’s normal spending routine or pattern so as not to break down the response to the prompt. Where possible, your aim should be to ensure a response and to avoid the puppy ignoring your request. Remember to continue to reward your puppy for positive responses and try, as with all commands, to avoid unnecessary repetition. In addition, it is wise to still use “busy-busy” occasionally when the puppy is actually spending ensuring the association between the prompt and the desired behaviour is maintained. If you have any problems developing this response in your puppy, please talk to your supervisor.

## House training

**Ensuring your puppy is clean in the house is not only essential for its future guide dog owner who will eventually own your puppy, but is also a huge benefit for you.**

In order to achieve this goal we need to educate the puppy on a number of levels. These include: teaching the “busy-busy” prompt; ensuring the puppy knows that it has a place where it can relieve itself; and ensuring the puppy develops a routine, to ensure spending occurs at the correct times.

Despite how it may seem initially, your puppy will become clean in the house. However, all puppies have different rates of learning. The important thing is to remain consistent in your approach and relaxed if accidents do occur. The more frustrated you appear, the less relaxed your puppy will be. The following advice may help with house training.

## The spending area

**During your interview your supervisor will have identified a suitable area for your puppy to relieve itself.**

Once you have established an appropriate area it is essential this area remains the only place where the puppy is encouraged to spend when at home. By ensuring the puppy is only able to use the designated area you reduce any confusion and anxiety.

Introduce your puppy to this area as soon as you receive it and allow the puppy up to ten minutes of supervised time to use the area for relief. This time is likely to reduce as the puppy understands what it is supposed to do there. Where possible, the puppy should be encouraged to follow the handler from the run (once it has spent) back into the house, thereby learning the usual route to and from the run. By exiting and entering the house via the same door for relief purposes, the puppy will know which way to go when needing to spend.



## Developing a routine during the day

The key to developing an appropriate routine lies in ensuring that frequent, regular and supervised spending opportunities are given to the puppy.

**At first, your puppy should be given the opportunity to spend when:**

- waking up after a sleep
- after eating
- after play or exercise
- before and after every socialising walk
- whenever it begins to show signs that you recognise as those it displays just prior to spending

In addition to this, it is sensible to give your puppy the chance to relieve itself at regular intervals (unless asleep). Remember to praise your puppy every time it relieves appropriately. If you take your puppy to the run and it will not go, don't worry – bring it back into the house, watch closely to prevent accidents, try again later.

If your puppy relieves itself in the house, try not to react unless you catch it in the act, in which case take it outside to the correct spot. However, at no time should you verbally or physically reprimand the puppy.

To further reduce the chances of spending indoors, you may wish to reduce the amount of access your puppy has to other areas in the house. By keeping it to a restricted area, within view, you will be able to monitor the puppy and look for indications that it needs to relieve itself and keep accidents to a minimum. Try also to reduce the distractions close to the spending area; a distracted puppy will not spend. Also consider your approach; keep calm, quiet and relaxed and avoid over-stimulation during relief opportunities.

**Once you have developed a routine you can start to increase the length of time between spending opportunities. This is a gradual process that will continue to develop and be consolidated throughout the puppy walking period. By the time your puppy is ready for training, it should be clean overnight and should not normally need to relieve itself more frequently than every three hours during the day.**



## Developing an overnight routine

**Developing an overnight routine can at first be more problematic than developing a daytime routine, as the period between opportunities are longer due to your own need to sleep. In addition, a young puppy can lack the physical ability to refrain from spending overnight. However, there are a number of practices which you can follow to help you and your puppy develop a clean overnight routine.**

**Ensure the puppy has been relieved before settling down for the night.** At first, it is sensible to put the puppy to bed as late as possible, so the period without spending opportunities is reduced. Providing an opportunity for the puppy to relieve itself first thing in the morning is also essential for the same reason.

**Reduce the available space in and around your puppy's bed to prevent wandering in the night;** the walking motion can encourage spending. Puppies generally do not like to spend in an area they have to occupy; using an indoor kennel can be appropriate.

**Make an area of newspaper available for the puppy to use if it does need to go in the night** – the paper will absorb any waste. This may be required until the puppy reaches approximately 16 weeks of age. However, it is important to gradually reduce the size of the paper area to make it less appealing and also to remove it as soon as the puppy is clean overnight. Be aware that the presence of paper can become associated with spending, so it should be removed when not required or its presence may increase the number of times your puppy spends.

Although eventually we do not want to be giving our dogs the opportunity to spend in the middle of the night, it may, at first, be necessary to provide such an opportunity as your puppy develops a routine. If your puppy wakes in the night indicating a need to relieve itself, ensure that you interact with it as little as possible and once spent, settle the puppy down again. You must try to avoid the puppy fully waking up and trying to promote a game as this will be habit-forming. If you believe the puppy does not need to spend or has just spent, then do not reward the behaviour by giving the puppy the attention it desires.

**Lastly, households tend to be busy places and the comings and goings of family can affect your puppy's routine.** If people are likely to wake the puppy in the night, for example by returning home from a working shift, it is important that the puppy is provided with an opportunity for relief, especially with young puppies. This is, however, something that should be phased out as the puppy matures. Most guide dog owners will not appreciate having to take their dog out in the middle of the night.



## How to achieve clean socialisation walks

Before discussing this further, it is important to establish what a clean walk is. Ideally, a puppy should not expect to relieve itself when on a walk. It should have an opportunity to relieve itself prior to leaving home, and be given the opportunity again upon its return.

As your puppy becomes older it is likely you will be out of the house for longer periods of time and that your puppy will need to relieve itself away from the home. This is fine and may well be something which will be required when your puppy becomes a working guide dog.

The important point is that the puppy must not spend unless it has been asked to do so. It is fine for the puppy to spend when requested by the handler at a suitable time and in a safe location, but it is inappropriate for the puppy to stop when walking or to pull onto a grass verge and spend when it decides to.

This inappropriate behaviour cannot only result in embarrassment for you and for staff, but may also result in safety issues for the guide dog's future owner.

You must always have poo bags so that waste can be cleaned up.

If spending does occur, it is best to ignore the behaviour; we do not want the puppy to worry about what it has done or think it has done the wrong thing. By not reacting to the puppy we make the situation less of an issue. To reduce spending incidents when on walks it is important to consider how long you walk your puppy for. We would suggest that a puppy is able to walk for the below durations at the following ages without needing to spend.

Age (in weeks)	Walking period (in minutes)
6-12	10 to 15
12-16	up to 20
16-24	up to 30
24 and above	up to 45

In addition to these timespans, ensure that your puppy has relieved itself before taking it out for a walk. Time your puppy's walks around its spending routine if possible and consider the environment you are walking in. Town centre work can make a puppy excited or anxious and both emotions can prompt a need to relieve.

If your destination is a park, it is likely that spending will occur during free running,

In addition, the dog's health - diet changes, feeding routine changes, upset tummies, seasons, cystitis, and neutering operations - can all affect your puppy's spending routines.

**If you find incidents of spending on walks are becoming more frequent or are developing into a regular pattern, please contact your supervisor for advice.**



## Teaching your puppy to spend away from home

**The needs of guide dog owners differ greatly, as do the environments and accommodation in which they live. To help our puppies adapt to their final homes it is important that we try to prepare them by exposing them to situations they are likely to meet as adults. You will continue to do this during your socialising walks, but preparation is also necessary with spending behaviour. Particular attention should be paid to the surface upon which the puppy spends, as well as giving it the opportunity to spend when on the lead.**

Before teaching your puppy to spend away from home, you should first ensure that your puppy has been through all three stages of developing the “busy-busy” prompt and is showing a good response to it. (Your puppy will be at least 16 weeks of age.)

Make sure the area you select is safe and free from obvious distractions. If keeping your puppy on a lead, then ensure the lead is as long as possible to give the puppy room to turn around. Do not, however, allow excessive sniffing, scavenging or pulling on the lead, as this will undermine your control.

**Finally, beware that the following factors can all affect your puppy’s spending routine:**

- inappropriate handling
- changes of handler routines
- change of diet
- change of feeding routines
- free-running routines
- water intake
- health (e.g. upset stomachs, seasons, spay/castration, etc.)
- travel
- environments (anxiety/stress/excitement)
- the weather

**If breakdowns in the routine occur, consider these factors and contact your supervisor for advice.**

**These action points must be followed at all times to support the agreed training process within the puppy walking department of Guide Dogs. Copyright © 2014**

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