**Puppy Handling Exercises**

Guide Dog puppies should be comfortable being handled by different people, not just their raisers. Puppy handling exercises teach the young pup that it is okay to be in a more submissive position and to be controlled by the handler. When introduced properly, these exercises will develop confidence in the pup. An easy way of ensuring that your puppy experiences plenty of handling by different people is to participate in puppy trading at club meetings.

Your CFR will do some of the puppy handling exercises with your puppy during evaluations to gauge how accepting he is when someone completely unfamiliar manipulates him. If he shows discomfort or insecurity at the time of evaluation you may be asked to do some additional work to increase his comfort level. Each pup is different and we want to give him or her every chance to be successful.

You can refer to your Puppy Manual, section 6.1 for specific information about developing trust through puppy handling exercises done by others. The key to developing this trust is to tailor the process to the specific puppy. Your puppy should be comfortable accepting puppy handling exercises from you, including being placed into a layover position. Once that is accomplished, you can expand his comfort level by including others in handling exercises; this is an important step towards developing your pup’s willingness to interact with others. Note: The manual mentions to refrain from ‘puppy passing’ once the puppy is thirteen weeks or older and this has led to some confusion. In first editions of the manual, actual holding of the puppies off the ground and physically passing them to another’s arms was encouraged and this is what ‘puppy passing’ is referring to. Obviously older puppies get heavy and difficult to ‘pass’ this way! We will be revising this part of the manual to explain that handing the puppy’s leash off to another person, once the pup is ready, is actually to be encouraged. A sensitive puppy should be handled in a way that gradually develops trust of strangers; a bolder puppy might sail through the process with little concern about the exercise. It is best to

start all puppies with a calming sit; a gentle, calm chest rub can go a long way in easing any concern or tension in the young pup. Once the puppy is relaxed, the new handler can move on to slowly stroking the front legs and sides of the body, building up to taking a peek at the ears and mouth.

As the puppy grows accepting of this type of touching, the handler may decide to progress to the layover. The layover should always be initially practiced in a familiar, quiet environment. When introducing the layover at puppy meetings, it is a good idea to give the puppy plenty of space away from other puppies so that it does not feel threatened at all. Softer puppies may not be ready to do the layover with a strange handler at first; it is best to keep the exercise relaxed and stop on a positive note. Some puppies may take several sessions of being with a new handler before they are ready for the layover. If in doubt, you should consult with your leader about technique; it is much easier to keep the puppy in the position when using the correct handling method for the exercise.

This willingness to be handled by others should be maintained throughout the time the puppy remains in the raiser’s home. It will need to be done on a regular basis to ensure that the puppy does not regress in his comfort level. Taking time at club meetings to do handling exercises with all of the puppies, by an assortment of people, is time well spent in the growth of a future Guide Dog.

Your puppy’s comfort level during puppy handling by a stranger translates directly into Guide Dog training. A puppy that is comfortable being manipulated into a variety of positions, by unfamiliar handlers, will be much easier to teach via leash cues when Guide Dog instructors show him how to maneuver through obstacles, stop for a curb and board an escalator. Solid obedience responses will be easier to achieve if he does not freeze up and resist the physical cues the handler uses to indicate direction. Sometimes dogs in training work with more than one instructor; a dog that can adapt easily to new handlers will learn faster and enjoy the experience more. Additionally a well-prepared puppy will be more agreeable to the veterinarian examining him and kennel technicians grooming him while he lives in the kennels. Once he is paired with his blind partner, his day-to-day life will require him to be physically positioned into a variety of situations such as under bus seats, tables and other tight areas. Acceptance of physical manipulation will make both his and his partner’s life much more agreeable!

Please check with your leader and/or CFR if you have any questions regarding puppy handling exercises and your puppy’s comfort level when handled by others.