

CFR Secrets for Success

Greetings Puppy Raisers!

The latest edition of the CFR Secrets for Success is below. You will also find the PDF version posted on the Forms page at www.guidedogs.com/forms. As you know, in each edition we are highlighting specific training techniques and management plans designed to support your ongoing work to prepare your puppies for formal training. We suggest that you keep these communications with your manual for future reference.

We hope you enjoy this edition!

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RAISING SOFTER PUPPIES

Why we are seeing more sensitive puppies:

- Due to the change in our client base the breeding staff have been meeting the demands of the training department for an easier to manage, more handler-sensitive dog. While being successful in producing that more biddable dog, the by-product is dogs that are more sensitive in general, including sensitivities to the environment. These puppies can be challenging to raise but are very willing and easy for a visually impaired person to control as adult Guide Dogs.
- Our lifestyles are increasingly busy and active, leading to raisers inadvertently over-socializing puppies at a young age. (Please see updated socialization guide.)

Signs of stress:

Dogs exhibit stress in different ways. A puppy becoming uncomfortable may show one or more of the following signs. Many of these behaviors are seen in circumstances other than stress but if you see several of these behaviors together and/or repetitively, you need to consider if your puppy is stressed.

- Wet mouth or drooling
- Lips pulled back tight or 'puffing' at the sides
- Panting
- Licking lips or nose; a clear runny nose
- Yawning
- Head lowered
- Ears back or stiff and tense
- Lowered body and tail (tail may tuck in extreme fear or discomfort)
- Sweaty pads (you can often see a wet paw print on the floor); dogs sweat through their feet
- Not wanting to walk on the leash, balking (stopping, sitting or lying down)
- Unwilling to exit the vehicle or leave the house

- Loose or extra stools while on an outing or just after returning from an outing
- Whining/vocalizing
- Hackling (extreme, usually only when fear or suspicion involved)
- Sniffing, scratching, grabbing at grass/leash, escalating behavior (displacement activity)
- Rampy behavior (rushing/pulling to get out of a situation or get it over with quickly)
- Being irritated by the jacket /scratching at the collar
- Excessive licking or chewing on the paws (would happen more at school/office than outside)

Socialize slowly and positively:

Puppies do need to be exposed to novel situations but with sensitive puppies the areas must be chosen carefully. A good example would be to take your puppy to a new, quiet situation, let's say a library, a couple of times. Make sure he is very comfortable in that particular library and avoid the busier sections. Once he is comfortable there try to find a different library where it is equally quiet and non-threatening and take him there a few times. Then perhaps go to the children's section in the library, being careful to keep him away from large groups of children. After a few exposures like this his next outing might be a quiet area in a friend's office. Try to find five novel situations per week of a similar level of difficulty, even if it just means visiting friends and relatives in their homes. Building up socialization like this will help build the confidence of a soft puppy.

Remember the rules of socializing a softer puppy:

- Go slowly with the socialization but do get the puppy out (review the socialization schedule in the puppy manual). There is plenty of time to work on building confidence but if you push the issue and create a fear it may be difficult or impossible to counter-condition that fear later.
- Avoid overly stimulating environments or situations that require firm control (greeting numerous people/toddlers, etc). Don't let the puppy get overwhelmed or over-stimulated by people wanting to pet it. Politely explain to people that the puppy is in training and carry it or walk it away in a calm manner. If the puppy is on a food protocol this may be a good time to utilize it.
- By avoiding such situations you don't put the puppy into a situation where you may have to correct it. Softer puppies should be handled with minimum corrections as it just adds to their stress. Don't insist on perfect obedience from softer pups; let them explore the world on their own terms. Keep control with a headcollar if necessary.
- Watch for praise opportunities as opposed to only correction opportunities. Be "praise focused"; make sure you are emphasizing what the pup is doing right as opposed to focusing on what it is doing wrong.
- Do quick 'in and outs' rather than taking the puppy shopping. Have a second handler who can take the puppy off to a distance or stay outside the store if it may be too overwhelming for the pup. *There is nothing wrong with leaving the pup at home if you are in doubt!*
- When working with softer puppies stop while they are still confident; don't keep pushing them until they have a negative reaction. Take small steps, even if it means it takes much longer to socialize the puppy.

- Don't go back to a place where a puppy had a negative reaction; avoid that area and work on building the pup's confidence in other areas for weeks or months before attempting to re-visit that particular situation.
- Praise and pet the puppy when he is showing confident behavior and don't coddle him when he is insecure. Just calmly make the situation easier for him by putting more distance between him and whatever is making him uncomfortable. Equally, never force a puppy to approach an object or situation he is afraid of.

Relieving Issues:

- Softer puppies are more likely to develop relieving issues.
- Extra care must be taken to follow relieving protocols and guidelines with sensitive puppies.
- If a puppy has an accident in a business or store do not go back to that store for months and be very careful (quick in and outs or staying at the entrance) in similar stores.
- Increase walking distances very slowly with softer puppies due to the increased potential for accidents which then become habits.

Avoidance of the puppy jacket:

Puppies who are stressed or nervous when out and about may avoid having their jacket put on as they begin to associate the jacket with being taken out in public. Sometimes it is hard to tell whether the puppy is just body sensitive and finds the jacket uncomfortable or if he is indeed making a negative association with the jacket and stress occurring outside the home. Consult with your leader/CFR for help in figuring this out and for recommendations to overcome this issue.

Balking Puppies:

- Younger pups: carry them away from home/vehicle and let them walk back. Then go to carrying them some distance away from home/vehicle before putting them down to continue walking away.
- Use a mentor dog (an older, calm pup or dog with a confident demeanor) but wean off as soon as the pup is comfortable.
- Use food (with approval of course) as a reward rather than a lure. This could include dinner in novel places. Ask your leader/CFR about a food protocol.
- Let the pup carry a favorite toy to 'parade'.
- Build up distance on walks slowly – too much too soon, or too noisy/scary can create an unhappy, balking pup.
- Ease off on obedience/corrections. Use the leash gently and let the soft puppy have more freedom to explore. Consider using a Flexi in areas that it is safe to do so.
- Don't make too big a deal of garbage mouth. Try to prevent picking up of leaves etc but don't scare the pup by grabbing at it. Some pups may relax and stop diving it things if they have their own toy to carry. Ask your leader/ CFR about the 'Boo Boo Bear' protocol.

At Meetings:

- Enter gradually. Stay off to one side of the activities or group.

- Be aware of the potential for over-stimulation.
- Stay in a corner and do puppy handling or practice something fun like 'Go to Bed'.
- Do not do lay-overs in a group situation with an insecure puppy or make him do anything that may be too dominating or stressful. This may mean not participating in obedience exercises for a while.
- Only do obedience exercises that your pup is very familiar with and does easily at home. Lower your criteria/demand less of him at meetings. This doesn't mean you let him get out of control but don't put him into a situation where you will need to correct him.
- Be careful about trading off to other handlers. Do so, but make sure it is someone who can be empathetic and not overwhelm the puppy. Explain to the new handler about 'positive' handling, avoiding collar corrections and not forcing the puppy into the down position.

General Handling for the Sensitive Puppy:

- Contact your leader immediately if you have concerns about your puppy being 'soft' or insecure. If in doubt, ask for advice on how to proceed. Occasionally, you may even be advised to just keep your pup home for a few weeks to give him an emotional break.
- Only do puppy handling when the puppy is relaxed; try to avoid having to dominate the puppy.
- Use the muzzle cradling technique rather than collar corrections during puppy handling.
- Use the calming sit more frequently with sensitive puppies rather than collar and leash corrections.
- Manage the puppy so that you avoid having to correct it as much as possible, especially when it is young. A crate or x-pen at work may be better than a tie-down.
- Do not correct a puppy that is vocalizing due to insecurity; distract it or move it further away from activities to a quiet area.
- Utilize the headcollar to control the puppy rather than correcting it constantly for garbage mouth etc.
- Consult your leader/CFR about proper use of the food protocol for appropriate behavior rather than trying to correct inappropriate behavior.

Raising sensitive puppies takes patience and skill. Puppies lacking in confidence can be complex and in some ways, are more challenging than those pushy, naughty puppies. Reserved puppies are more dependent on their raisers for support and need thoughtful, attentive handling. But the rewards are huge as you see the pup grow in confidence daily and get ready for the challenges ahead as a working guide.