

Preventing Counter Surfing and Scavenging

See the document “Teaching Good House Behavior” for more information on developing well-behaved pups in the home.

Goal Behavior

The puppy will demonstrate sufficient self-control to prevent investigation of items that are on counters, coffee tables, or any other elevated surface. The puppy will not place its head or its feet on these surfaces regardless of any distractions present. The puppy will not persistently sniff the floors looking for dropped food etc.

Initial Training Session Objectives

The puppy will gradually learn to be in an area with interesting smells and objects without taking the opportunity to investigate. Exposure to food and other distractions should increase as the puppy proves reliable at each step outlined below. Each puppy will progress at a different rate depending upon its temperament and maturity level.

Prerequisites

Puppies should start this training immediately. Polite food taking should be introduced prior to this exercise. The exercises “Ground Tether” and “Hand Tether” with distractions will also help teach the puppy to ignore food and items on the floor and can be practiced around the home too.

Session Set Up

When introducing this exercise, the environment should be quiet. It should be free from activity, strong odors, toys, other pets, and food bowls. Sweeping the floor might be helpful.

- The puppy should be on a dragline.
- The puppy should be in a training mindset, the raiser can work on loose leash walking or similar exercise prior to beginning this exercise.
- The puppy should follow the raiser into the area and receive frequent food rewards for having all four feet on the floor. The raiser can judge the effectiveness of food delivery by whether the pup remains engaged but not so focused on the handler that it ignores everything else in the environment. (For this reason, we will not be marking before offering a food reward; we do not want the puppy going into “game on” mode and offering behaviors to earn rewards. Food delivery should be calm and relaxed.)
- The raiser can move around the room slowly to encourage movement from the puppy, reinforcing the puppy’s good decisions to keep its feet on the floor.
- If the puppy attempts to investigate the counter by jumping up, the raiser should step on the line to prevent it. The raiser should immediately reward the puppy when all four feet are on the floor again. It is preferable that the puppy is prevented from jumping up by timely food rewards than having to be corrected with the leash.
- Although scavenging is not desirable, it is acceptable if the puppy briefly sniffs the floor.

Teaching the Puppy Not to Scavenge in the Kitchen or Bathroom

- The puppy should only be in these environments when closely monitored until it can be trusted not to engage in inappropriate behaviors. Prevention is key in developing good behavior in pups. The environment should be clear of anything tempting to prevent any inadvertent reinforcement from occurring.
- Training opportunities and freedom in the house should be based on the puppy's age and level of progress. Just one successful episode of counter surfing or scavenging could be enough to encourage a lifetime of seeking behavior.
- If the puppy attempts to investigate a temptation, the raiser should either redirect the puppy by calling it to them or interrupt the pup with a verbal reprimand ""Ay!" With some puppies a quick tug on the dragline may be necessary.
- If a puppy has a tendency to scavenge, the leader should be contacted. Other techniques may be recommended by the leader or CFR.

Tips for success:

- The raiser should keep these initial sessions short, positive and frequent to allow for optimal learning.
- The puppy should only be in the kitchen/bathroom environment when actively training to prevent accidental reinforcement from occurring.
- As the puppy demonstrates success, more distractions may be added.
- Raisers should remain vigilant even with puppies who have not demonstrated negative behaviors in the past.
- Puppies should be monitored or confined during busy times in the home to prevent undesirable behavior and reinforce good behavior.

Learning appropriate house behaviors is one of the most important things that a guide dog puppy needs to accomplish. A dog that has inappropriate house behavior cannot become a working guide or a breeding dog for the program. If a raiser experiences poor progress when working with a pup on house behavior, the leader/CFR should be consulted for additional help.