

## **South West and Wales region: puppy raising update April 2025**

Hi All, Leah Rogers here. I am the Puppy Raising Operations Manager for the South West and Wales Region.

### **Puppy Raising Operations Manager's message**

Welcome to the South West and Wales regional update. In this update, we focus on 'consistency and routine' in puppy raising and why it's so important. Don't forget, there's a video in April's puppy raising newsletter which provides an overview and spotlights the following areas/topics:

- Toileting
- Incorporating separation while preparing your meals
- Settling

Consistency and routine are essential in a puppy's life. It creates stability, predictability and therefore reduces any stress or anxiety that a dog may feel.

Imagine if you didn't know what was coming or happening in your life and how this would affect your stress/anxiety and therefore your ability to cope with everyday tasks. This is how your puppy may feel in different situations throughout the day.

If we look forward, these routines are essential when your puppy goes in for guide dog training and eventually qualifies as a guide dog. Some guide dog owners can rely on routine to relieve their anxiety about situations, and if your dog has a predictable routine then this can also relieve the stress on the guide dog owner which helps to create a better dog/owner relationship.

So, imagine that you didn't know when you were going to eat next, how would this make you feel? Feeding is a basic welfare requirement for a dog. It's one of the five freedoms, and having a regular feeding routine will make your puppy feel secure and happy, also full enough to manage their day and learn tasks in a positive way.



One of the ways the puppy raising team is looking at consistency is around food preparation and whistle use. Is your puppy sitting/standing waiting patiently for their food or are they jumping up at you?

Are you now using your whistle every feed time to make sure your puppy builds an excellent association between the food/whistle to allow you to have a good recall response while out doing off-lead exercise?

Does your puppy have a regular/reliable toileting routine? Can they toilet on all surfaces? Can they toilet when asked to do so on-lead? And are they able to spend at home before going out on a training walk?

All these things will help prepare your puppy when they enter training and eventually matched with their future guide dog owner. When your puppy goes to big school, conversations between your Puppy Development Advisor and the Guide Dog Trainer on what your pup's spending routine is will be very valuable in keeping consistency at the time of change for your puppy.

One of the benefits of having a guide dog puppy is that they are allowed into more environments than your average pet dog, so they're exposed to a diversity of environments and of course learn how to settle in them. Having a member of the public come up and say "I didn't even know there was a dog there" will make you feel very proud of yourself and your puppy.

How do we manage this? Again, through consistency and practice. Think about the environments that you take your puppy into and at what age. Are you setting them up for success?

Look at what you are using to create this settle. Are you using food? This can lead to undesirable behaviours which can be hard to wean off. Your Puppy Development Advisor will be able to advise you on your individual pups' requirements in this area.



## **Team update**

The puppy raising team have been working hard to process all the new puppy raiser applications for the busy summer ahead to place new puppies.

I would like to thank all those volunteers who continue to support our Puppy Development Advisors in dog handling assessments and all the mentors who continue to support new and existing puppy raisers alike.

Finally, a big thank you to you all for your continued hard work, we are all a big team with one end goal, to transform your puppy into a guide dog that can give someone with sight loss a life of greater independence.

Thanks,

**Leah Rogers**

**Puppy Raising Operations Manager - South West and Wales**

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