

## South East region: puppy raising update August 2025

Hi All, Helena Gibbons here, Puppy Raising Operations Manager for the South East Region.

### Puppy Raising Operations Manager's message

It doesn't seem like a minute since my last message to you, so it's clear that we all must have been very busy! I'm aware of all the amazing group visits, fundraising and awareness events many of you have been involved with and the various stories and pictures are always a pleasure to hear and see. As ever, thank you for all your commitment. I hope you enjoy this August update.

I am really enjoying our current focus on 'manners', including this update's **focus on door manners**.

Reaching my 20<sup>th</sup> year at Guide Dogs, I am so aware of what a difference these seemingly little things can make to a future guide dog owner.

Teaching puppies good door manners is a little more than a nice-to-have, it plays an essential part of setting them up for success as a future guide dog. Learning to wait calmly at doorways helps keep the dog safe, prevents bolting into unsafe environments, and encourages self-control in exciting situations. It's also a fantastic way to reinforce basic cues in real-life contexts.

As our pups grow and prepare for the next stage of their training, door manners become increasingly important. Whether it's entering a busy shop, waiting to get on a bus, or greeting someone at the front door, they need to stay calm, focused, and relaxed. Practising these behaviours early on helps the puppy develop confidence and prepares them for a wide range of public access scenarios later.





I know our puppy raisers have already been focusing on this behaviour, and it's been lovely to see pups learning to pause and check in with their handlers before going through doorways. Puppy Development Advisor, Jo Thorn, has been working on door manners at a recent puppy class and says: "We took the time to really focus on door manners in puppy class recently because it's such a great foundation for safety and developing a relaxed attitude to the world."

"It's also something that can be easily practised at home, and it makes a big difference in everyday situations. I'm so grateful for my puppy raisers taking the time to practice this important behaviour."

**Tip:** This behaviour can be tricky for young pups, especially when they're excited to get outside! Start small, even just pausing for a second before going through the door is a great first step. Use plenty of positive reinforcement to reward calm behaviour and build up slowly. Practising at quiet times and using consistent cues will help your pup understand what's expected and make the learning process fun and rewarding.

Keep up the brilliant work, everyone! These small daily routines make a big difference to our dogs' development and your consistency is what helps them improve every day.

## Hello from Puppy Development Supervisor Ron Hastings



Hi everyone, my name is Ron Hastings and I'm one of two Puppy Development Supervisors in the South East. I've been with Guide Dogs since the early 90s, starting out in the kennels, progressing to work as a Guide Dog Trainer and finally moving into the Puppy Department around 20 years ago. Many of our long-standing raisers may recognise me, having worked across much of Kent, Essex and Hertfordshire in that time. What really drew me to the puppy world was the chance to work more closely with our brilliant volunteers and help prepare our dogs

for their next big adventure. It's a role full of variety - no two days are ever the same, and that's just how I like it!

I've been a Puppy Development Supervisor (PDS) for over 10 years now, and honestly, it's such a brilliant job. I get to work with an amazing, enthusiastic team of Puppy Development Advisors and see first-hand the dedication and passion they and our volunteers bring to everything they do. Even when things get a bit tricky, commitment never falters and that never goes unnoticed.

Looking back over the years what I appreciate most working in Guide Dogs is how we've evolved over the years. The world's changed a lot, different climate, different ways of living and different challenges but we've adapted, stayed strong, and kept doing what we do best. And at the heart of all that is our volunteers, who make it all possible.

Thanks for everything you do, you are absolute stars and it's a real pleasure working alongside you!

### Dog body condition score

Part of my work as a PDS is to go out and see your puppies, particularly those that we are considering for breeding who have to be the best of the

best; so, I'm very used to seeing all our dogs in their different stages of puppyhood and how they should look. I saw that in the North East regional puppy raising update that one of my PDS colleagues shared the following information on how to take pictures for our body condition score work and thought it was so good, I'd share it here for you all too.

When we request a monthly weight update, it is useful for us to have photographic evidence, on your pup's file. The best way for this is a photo, so that we can see two specific views. Have a look at the following pictures, which give you a good indication of what we are looking for. And, how to best take the photograph.

### **One: taking a side profile photo**



#### **Do:**

- Use good lighting
- Where possible have a contrasting background
- Enlist a helper! Having a helper to gain the pups attention and to encourage them to remain still
- Have the dog in the standing position, standing as straight as possible
- Crouch or kneel (adjacent to the dog) so that you're level with the dog's height



- Include the whole dog in the picture

Following these tips allows us to see the abdominal tuck clearly and identify any excess deposits of fat over the pelvis area, chest and sternum.

## Two: taking an ariel view photo



### Do:

- Use good lighting
- Have a contrasting background
- A helper is always useful!
- Have the dog in a standing position
- Stand as straight as possible
- The photograph is taken directly from above
- Stand behind the pup
- Include the whole dog in the picture

This allows us to clearly see the shape of the dog, demonstrating a defined waist. We can also see if there is no excess of fat covering over the shoulder area or pelvic area.

## When to seek help or advice



This is a photograph of an overweight dog, scoring 7/9 on an adult body condition score.

Note the following signs:

- lack of abdominal tuck
- fat deposits over the lumbar area (lower back) & tail base
- fat pad over the sternum (front of chest)
- heavy fat covering over the ribs (no definition between rib cage and abdominal area)

If you're asked by your Puppy Development Advisor to send in photos of your puppy you can email them to [information@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:information@guidedogs.org.uk). They will then upload it to your pup's file. Please include your puppy's name/computer number and weight update in the subject line.

## Regional initiatives

### In-person learning session

In June, Kent Puppy Development Advisors organised an optional learning session for our puppy raisers. We were thrilled to see a high level of interest, with a wide range of experience among attendees. Some were brand new to puppy raising, while others had been volunteering for many years, with over 20 puppies raised!





The session took place at our Maidstone Community Team site and focused on PORTL (Portable Operant Research and Teaching Lab) training.

PORTL helps the learner refine their training timing and gain a better understanding of how their training and timing influence their puppy's learning, giving them a chance to feel what it might be like to be in their puppy's shoes.

We're hopeful this will be the first of many similar sessions we can offer to support our puppy raisers in the future.

### **Online learning sessions**

We are continuing to offer our online learning sessions which are bookable via our e-learning platform, Kallidus. Sessions run on the third Tuesday of every month at 11:00am. They cover various topics and last for around an hour. Your Puppy Development Advisor will share this information with you, so please look out for it.

Thank you for all you are doing and look forward to seeing you all soon,  
Helena,

**Puppy Raising Operations Manager - South East**

**Document ends.**