

Puppy Raising

Recall and off-lead guidance

Version 1.2

Updated September 2024

Sections

There are 2 topics within this document. By following each link below you will be directed straight to that area of guidance.

- 1. Recall and off-lead guidance**
- 2. Building an association with the whistle and food**



1. Recall and off-lead guidance

In this section

In this section, you'll learn how to teach your puppy to come back when you call them and how to manage and engage with your puppy for success in an off-lead environment. By the end of your puppy raising journey, we would ideally like your puppy to:

- Have associated the whistle with food.
- Have demonstrated the ability to consistently recall to voice and/or whistle at a safe speed, making contact by touching a hand, held out to the side and without jumping up.
- Remain stationary whilst the lead is re-attached to the collar.
- Have experienced a few different off-lead areas.
- Generally recall away from other dogs in most situations in a timely manner.

Quick links

By following each link below, you will be directed to the area within this guidance to support that area of learning.



Why



Knowing your puppy



Managing for success



Teaching foundations



Being a partnership



Why

Why is this important for a guide dog?

Off-lead exercise is important for a dog's health and wellbeing, but poor recall can impact on a guide dog owner's confidence to let their dog off the lead in public spaces. Off-lead exercise remains an essential part of a guide dog's routine.



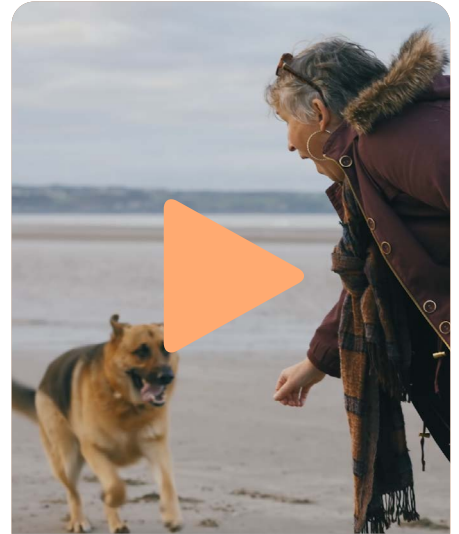
Knowing your puppy

Please read the [Off-lead section in the essential information](#) first, so you are aware of our insurance requirements, and you can keep everyone as safe as possible.

Off-lead exercise is an activity where accidents and injuries can easily occur, so please read this section carefully.

Age:

- The age a puppy can go off-lead is based on their vaccination status and how they are progressing with recall. Your puppy will first need to know the basics of recall training at home and in the garden. Once these criteria have been met, your Puppy development Advisor (PDA) will support the next steps.
- Your Puppy Development Advisor needs to be present for your puppy's first session of off-lead exercise away from home. They will arrange this with you directly.



[Video: Guide dog owner exercising dog on busy beach.](#)

Amount of exercise:

- Please discuss with your Puppy Development Advisor how long it is appropriate to exercise your individual puppy for. The duration and frequency of off-lead exercise depends on the puppy's age and energy levels. As a guide, puppies can have up to 10 minutes of daily exercise (lead walk, training and off-lead walks combined) per month of age.
- As your puppy gets older, they can do slightly longer off-lead exercise sessions, but please avoid lengthy runs (several miles long) as this can put pressure on developing joints and increase the risk of some conditions. Please discuss the specifics for your puppy with your Puppy Development Advisor.



Ensure your puppy is always in sight and not behind you.



Managing for success

To be able to let your puppy off-lead away from home you are aiming for around 90% successful practice sessions in your home and garden.

Choosing suitable environments for off-lead exercise:

- Secure
- Away from roads and railways
- No steep banks, drops to water or access to deep or fast flowing water.
- Free from hazards such as broken glass, litter, and syringes
- A distance away from, and with a barrier between, children's play areas and picnic areas
- Away from livestock. Your puppy must on a lead at all times when livestock is around.

Gastric bloat:

- Gastric bloat is a dangerous condition caused by too much air in the stomach and can be fatal. This is easily prevented by not completing off-lead exercise with your puppy for an hour both before and after meals.

Other:

- Please don't let your puppy off-lead in areas that are known to be dangerous or when you're distracted (for example by your phone). If you're walking in an isolated area, ensure that somebody knows where you are or that you are contactable.
- If your puppy is motivated by toys, interact and engage with play during off-lead exercise. It's important however that your puppy has mixed walks of sniffing, play with other dogs and toys. They should also have manners around toys, waiting patiently for them to be thrown.
- Please don't use tennis balls or footballs, due to their size and material. You can use dog specific balls (e.g. Rubber KONG ® balls on a rope) if needed. Please read the [Toys section in Preparing for your puppy](#) or speak to your PDA if unsure.
- Please don't repetitively throw items or use toys designed for this purpose such as ball throwers. This is to protect developing joints and prevent arthritis or strains. Stick throwing or chasing should be always discouraged due to the risk of injury to your puppy.
- Ensure your puppy is always in sight and not behind you.
- When off lead, puppy must be wearing a collar and GDs ID tag. They will not wear a Ttouch harness, head collar or puppy jacket unless specifically requested by the PDA

Please speak to your us for more information or if you have any questions.

Please also read the document [Whistle association guidance](#)



Teaching recall

Stage 1: Beginning an association

Teaching name recognition

The aim in this section is for your puppy to learn their name. Whilst you're teaching name recognition, try to only use your puppy's name as part of this training.

- Pick a low distraction environment (generally a room in your house your puppy is regularly in) and a moment when your puppy is close to you and looking at you (or in your direction).
- Say your puppy's name and immediately follow with food (the puppy's own food is generally fine for this exercise). Repeat these two or three times in a row, three or four times a day.
- Test whether your puppy is building the association by calling their name when they are distracted. We want the puppy to stop what they are doing and look up at you. If they do, then reward with some food reward as a big well done. If not, repeat step 2 a bit more and try again later.
- When your puppy can do step 3, try in different rooms of the house, and then gradually move into the garden too. Always reward with food or a toy at this stage.

Summary

Say puppy's name - Puppy gives attention -
Puppy gets reward



Only use your puppy's name as part of this training.

Teaching response to 'Come'

- Pick a low distraction environment and a moment when your puppy is close to you and looking at you (or in your direction).
- Say your puppy's name once then the recall cue 'Flash, come', then immediately reward them with multiple, really tasty food rewards (or an exciting game with a toy, whichever they prefer!)
- Deliver your food rewards one after the other, rather than all in a handful to make the reward last longer and seem more exciting. This teaches the puppy that the recall cue 'come' means great things will follow!
- Repeat the above several times, with some quiet time in between each repetition.
- Practice this in different rooms of the house, and then gradually move into the garden.

Summary

Say puppy's name – Say come – Puppy gives attention
– Puppy gets reward

Stage 2: Developing a response

Aim: Your puppy learns to run towards you when you say their name and 'Come'.

- Pick a low distraction environment (generally a room in your house your puppy is regularly in), and a moment when your puppy is a couple of metres away from you and looking at you.
- Say your puppy's name and 'come' in a sing song voice. Please read the section on [whistle feeding](#) in Whistle association guidance.
- Your puppy should start to move towards you in anticipation of the reward. As soon as your puppy moves towards you, give lots of vocal praise and have your food reward or toy ready. If your puppy doesn't immediately run towards you, you can give them some further encouragement by tapping your legs and taking a few steps backwards.

- Don't wait until your puppy has already moved close to you to give vocal praise. You should begin praising as soon as your puppy starts moving to make this as rewarding as possible.



Praise as soon as your puppy begins to move towards you.

Summary

Say puppy's name and 'come'– puppy runs towards you – reward your puppy

Stage 3: Progression

Aim: Making it a bit harder by calling from further away and with some distractions.

- Now that your puppy has associated the cue with orientating towards you, you can begin to make it a little bit harder. It is important at this stage that food or toy rewards remain out of sight (but close to you– for example in a treat pouch.)
- When they are in the same room as you but a short distance from you (five or so paces away from you), repeat the first two stages. Remember to praise as soon as your puppy begins to move towards you, don't wait to praise for them to reach you. Do a single repetition, several times a day to spread out the practice.
- When your puppy can consistently come to you in the same room from varying distances, you can begin to make things a bit harder:
 - Recall when puppy is distracted with a toy in the same room
 - Recall when puppy is in a different room
 - Recall when puppy is in garden
 - Recall from garden to inside the home
 - Recall from inside the home into the garden
 - Recall away from another member of the household (if applicable)

Summary

Look out for opportunities when your puppy is further away or interested in something else. Say puppy's name and 'come'– puppy runs towards you – reward puppy

Teaching the release cue 'okay'

Aim: Your puppy understands that when they hear the cue 'okay', there are no more rewards until next time and they are free to move off.

- Again, in a low distraction environment, recall your puppy as you have done in the above stages. Remember you are not asking them for a sit or any other position when they have come to you, we are just rewarding for the recall itself.
- When they return to you, keep giving them food rewards or keep them playing an exciting game for 10-15 seconds. Just after you give them their last food reward, say your release cue 'Okay', then take your attention off your puppy and allow them to go off on their own again.
- If they don't move away independently, you could encourage them by giving them a toy or chew to play with on their own, so they understand the interaction with you has finished. Make sure that after you have said 'okay' you don't continue to provide food reward or play with the puppy.

Summary

Puppy recalls and gets rewarded – say 'okay' and move away to finish this repetition

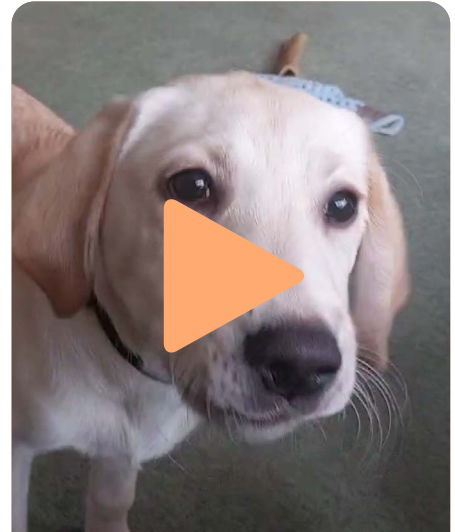
Introduction of collar hold and lead attachment

When off the lead, some puppies learn to 'dance' out of reach because being held by the collar signals to them the end of fun. This is particularly difficult for a guide dog partner to manage; it may cause embarrassment and lead to anxiety if they are unable to get their dog back.

Aim: The puppy remains still whilst the lead is reattached to the collar both during and at the end of a recall session.

Before starting this exercise, your puppy should demonstrate being comfortable when you take their collar and hold for duration of 10 seconds. This exercise is building on learning from the [Equipment module](#).

- When your puppy is consistently recalling back to you, start to periodically touch their collar whilst rewarding and develop as per the collar hold behaviour.
- When completely comfortable with the collar being held, occasionally clip the lead back on to their collar before unclipping and using the release cue okay.
- Vary the number of times you clip the lead on, where you recall your puppy within the environment and the duration of time the puppy is on lead prior to using your release cue, within each session.
- At times, when releasing your puppy engage with play and at other times release and dog can run freely.



[Video:](#) Introducing recall at home.

Adding the hand touch

Aim: Your puppy will target your hand with their nose.

- Please read the section on [Teaching a hand touch](#) in the recall and off-lead guidance- eLearning.
- Recall your puppy as normal and hold your hand out to one side and at your puppy's nose level. Ensure that you continue to praise your puppy as they run towards you - don't go silent!
- As soon as your puppy makes contact with your hand reward and remember to occasionally re-attach the lead before unclipping and using the release cue.

Summary

Give your puppy the recall cue and hold your hand out to one side - praise as they run towards you - as soon as they touch your hand, gently take collar with your free hand and then release food reward - say 'okay', releasing hold on collar and move away to finish this repetition.

A circular process map, with 7 text boxes that read - 1. Recall 'Flash Come'. 2. Present hand target. 3. Puppy targets hand. 4. Reward with food or play. 5. clip on lead/clip off lead randoml 6. Release cue 'Okay'. 7. Puppy goes off again.



Your Puppy Development Advisor will help you put all this into action on during our first session of off-lead exercise with your puppy. To be able to let your puppy off-lead away from home you are aiming for around 90% successful practice sessions in your home and garden.



Photo: Appropriate environment.



Photo: Inappropriate environment.



Being a partnership

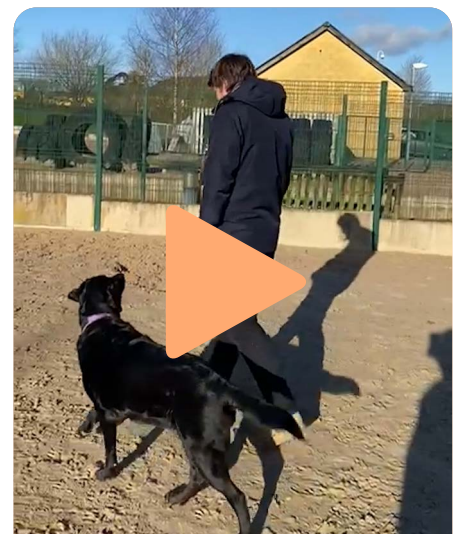
Once your puppy is off-lead in open environments:

- You should only be responsible for completing off-lead exercise with one dog at a time. A maximum of two guide dogs can be off-lead together at any time each with an individual handler.
- If your puppy returns to you when off-lead without being cued, offer them a food reward for checking in. This will assist in maintaining a positive association with returning to you.

- Make sure you are using rewards that your puppy loves. Generally, their daily kibble isn't high enough value to use in recall. Try some different types of approved food reward or a squeaky toy.
- Ensure you aren't just calling your puppy back around other dogs. This is really hard for your puppy and can have an impact on your recall overall. Do two or three easy recalls with no distractions around in each off-lead exercise session so your puppy maintains their positive associations with recall.
- Choose a quieter environment where there are less dogs. Woods can be easier as they are less 'open plan', particularly for those puppies who scan the environment for dogs to play with.
- It can also be good to ensure your puppy gets some time for appropriate dog interactions – perhaps speak to your PDA about pairing up with another guide dog puppy of suitable temperament to help yours.
- If your puppy does run off to play with another dog and doesn't come back when called, stop calling them and calmly walk over to collect them and pop back on lead until in a quieter space.
- If your puppy prefers toys, have a special toy that they only get during recall.
- Never tell your dog off when they do eventually come back!
- Being off-lead with another (well trained) dog can also help – check with your PDA if this is suitable.
- Don't always walk in the same direction or start/end the off-lead exercise in the same place, change directions so your puppy keeps an eye on where you are.

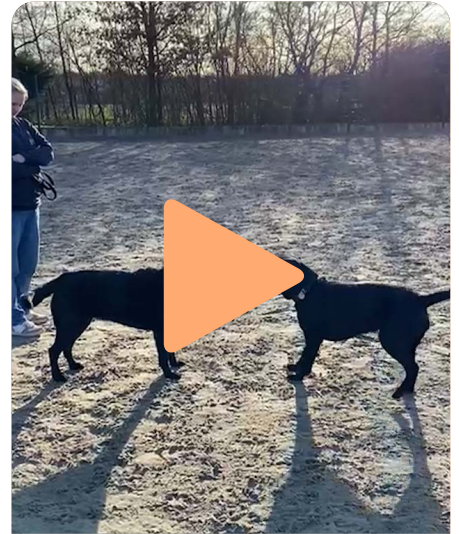


Video: Engaging with your puppy off-lead.

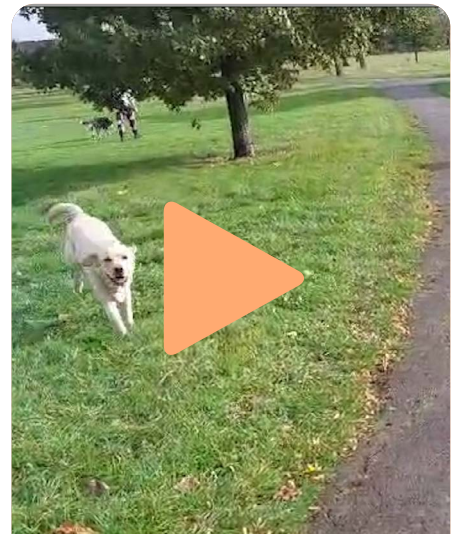


Video: Not engaging with your puppy off-lead.

- Mix up what you are doing with your puppy when off-lead to keep them engaged, interested and encourage them to stay with you. Include play and interaction with suitable toys. ([Hyperlink to preparing for your puppy](#))
- Please report any issues you experience to you Puppy Development Advisor, to enable us to provide you with support.



Video:
Appropriate and inappropriate play.



Video: Recall away from another dog.

2. Building an association with the whistle and food

In this section

This exercise describes how to teach your puppy the association between the whistle and coming towards you for a reward.

Quick links

By following each link below, you will be directed to the area within this guidance to support that area of learning.



Why



Knowing your puppy



Managing for success



Teaching foundations



Being a partnership



Why

Why is this important for a guide dog?

Some guide dog owners find projecting their voice difficult in an outdoor environment and instead use a whistle for recall. By using a whistle, anyone with the dog off-lead has a consistent and familiar way to recall them. For your puppy's future partner, it's therefore important that your puppy has a strong positive association with the whistle.



Knowing your puppy

Most puppies will be intrigued by the sound of a whistle. Some puppies may however be worried by the noise if it is blown loudly. Before you look to introduce the whistle think about how your puppy generally responds to sounds. Not all puppies are motivated by the same things, so it is important you consider your puppy as an individual and associate the whistle with things they find reinforcing. For most puppies this will involve using the whistle every feeding time.



Managing for success

- You'll be given a whistle; if you lose it, please contact Guide Line and we can arrange for a new whistle to be sent out.
 - For most puppies the easiest way to fit this training into your day is to introduce the whistle at feeding time so your puppy pairs the sound of the whistle. In addition, you can also do it in separate sessions pairing the whistle with something that is high value to your puppy.
 - Weigh out daily food amounts in advance.
 - Whilst you're preparing your puppy's food, it may be easier for them to be in another puppy-proofed room, in their pen or crate and entertained with another family member or with an interactive toy.
 - When feeding your puppy, if you have additional dogs
- 15 in your home, please feed them in a separate room.

“

Practising this exercise and building a positive association with the whistle really helps their future guide dog partner with being confident with their dog off-lead.



Teaching foundations

Your PDA will advise you when to start introducing the whistle at feeding time and the process will be like that described in the **Learning Manners – [Food manners](#) – eLearning**.

Our aim is for your puppy to build a very strong response to the sound of the whistle with something they really enjoy. That way, any time your puppy hears 3 short pips of the whistle, no matter what they are doing or where they are, they respond by coming to you and engaging in a fun time (involving food rewards, or play, or both).

Please note: At feeding time, we're still aiming for a calm puppy leading up to and after 3 short pips of the whistle have been blown.

- Make sure you have your whistle in your hand and calmly bring your puppy to the feeding area whilst the food remains out of the way, for example on the work surface.
- As soon as your puppy is calm with all 4 paws on the floor, give 3 short pips on the whistle and straight away put the food bowl in front of your puppy and let them eat undisturbed.

Progression

- Your PDA will advise you when to start introducing the whistle for recall.



Being a partnership

- The important aspect of whistle association is that once your puppy hears the whistle, something they love (generally their food) is instantly available.
- Remember to use the whistle as part of your everyday feeding routine.
- Your PDA will advise how this whistle association can be linked in with recall at a later date.



Video: Younger puppy whistle association