

Collar Cues

Note: This document and accompanying videos are for raiser use in the trials of the R+ program. This is not an official GDB document and the videos are obviously not polished, edited, teaching videos. We just wanted you to have a tool to help you while we are still in the process of developing this method. Soon we will have an official document and videos on collar cues using GDB puppies!

Teaching a puppy to respond to collar cues gives us another way to communicate with the puppy. Subtle pressure on the leash cues the puppy to step backwards, forwards, sideways and to pivot. It helps teach the puppy the perfect “heel” position and allows us to communicate exactly where we want the puppy doing the “foundation positions”. It prepares the puppy for loose leash walking and promotes responsiveness on leash. Take a look at Daisymae and her raiser Lesley, one of the first R+ puppies:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hj0yDgryleo>

Teaching collar cues to a puppy is more easily accomplished when the puppy is small. It is physically easier to move a smaller dog obviously, but also when the pup is young, and hasn't had much exposure to sitting on cue, he is more maneuverable. It is much simpler to move a puppy that is on his feet than to move one that is sitting on his bottom like he is glued there! For this reason we ask you not to focus on “sit” for the first week or two that you have your puppy. Don't have him sit for meals and try to get him up on his feet by luring when you reward him for anything. It's not too big a deal if your puppy comes to you already “sit happy” as he'll still get the idea; it's just easier if he stays standing.

For those of you who have difficulty bending, you can use a stool to sit on while you teach the beginning stages of collar cues. Here is Elmo yielding to leash pressure:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xz-tYUesVHM>

The pressure is applied gradually and gently. As soon as you feel the dog yield (he may not actually take a step at first) you mark with “nice!” immediately slacken off the pressure and reward. You may use either hand to hold the leash. If the puppy wants to “mug” you for the food when you are seated, place the kibble on a counter where you can reach it while seated and hand it to him from there. Meanwhile work on your polite taking of food exercises separately.

Once the pup is going back and forth pretty easily, focus more on your left side; ultimately that's where we want the puppy to be. Here's a video of a 12 week old puppy really starting to understand the collar cue game. This is a very high energy pup with tremendous focus – I would not expect your puppy to be as intense or as “vertical” at times!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1onCq6KVeU>

The following video shows how to start teaching the puppy to pivot into heel position. Most often when a puppy, or even a guide, is not straight, it's because it is wrapping its shoulders around in front of the handler and swinging its rear end out. Being able to respond to subtle collar cues to move the rear end in will help keep the dog straight and close to the handler. This is demonstrated by a slower, more methodical "puppy":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZuQl-qjj2Lg>

Notice how the hand may need to hold the leash very close to the collar and the pressure is applied back and in, the way we want the dog's rear end to go. Observe carefully the positioning of the left hand and how it turns; this will help you get the correct feel on the puppy's collar.

Here is a seasoned dog that responds to the lightest touch on a buckle collar to adjust his position. He sits more than I would prefer in this video, because we have been working on that recently, but when he was first learning this it was all in a stand position:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MMCd0_GiJeM

Once your puppy is moving to collar pressure left and right, back and forth, we will show you how to add pressure downwards, along with a food lure. This will help later once we start teaching foundation positions.

Please contact your CFR if you have any difficulties teaching these exercises – and have fun!