

Training Exercise for New Lisbon Raisers

Prepared by John Feters on May 5, 2020

Stairs

It's important that guide dogs can walk easily and beside their handler going both up and down any type of stairs. Here are some tips to help you practice with your dog.

- Going up is usually easier than going down.
- Have the dog wait at the base of the staircase until you signal that it's time to go up by saying "Let's Go"
- Start by having your partner walk up the stairs just slightly ahead of you and the dog.
- Take it slow and keep a short leash which will help make it harder for the dog to run ahead. Go one step at a time.
- Praise and treat the dog along the way up the stairs, especially if they seem hesitant. Do NOT treat if they pull ahead.
- Once you reach the top of the stairs, walk around before heading back down. Spend some time relaxing and petting your dog.
- When going down, use your partner again by having them walk one or two steps ahead at the same slow, easy pace. This will help build the dog's confidence.
- Praise and treat profusely as the dog proceeds down each step. IE: praise and treat on each step. If necessary, lure the dog with a treat to move to the next step.
- Once you reach the floor level, praise and treat your dog for walking all the way down the stairs. Reward them with some playtime.
- Now, repeat, repeat and repeat some more until the dog can walk nicely beside you going both up and down the stairs following your partner slightly ahead of you.
- Once they can do this, it is time to increase the distance between you and your partner. Have them gradually increase the number of steps that separate you. Practice doing this until the dog is comfortable and is walking nicely beside you.
- Eventually, you will be able to go up and down stairs without your partner walking ahead of you.
- Once your dog has mastered this it is time to teach them to "find the stairs". Goal is to have the dog place their front paws on the first step and stop and wait. This signals to the blind person that they are approaching stairs. The dog should then wait until you give them the "Let's go" command. The dog should also do this at the top of the staircase by placing their paws on the floor with their back feet on the last step and stop and wait. So, the dog is stopping and waiting at the bottom and top of the stairs whether they are going up or down.
- Teach this by stopping when the dog places their paws on the first step and praise by saying "Yes" and treating them. Wait a few seconds and then give them the "let's go" command. Repeat once you get to the last step. At this point, you are not giving them any command, but rather rewarding them stopping at the first and last step. Eventually, you will notice the dog is catching on and will stop and look at you to get their treat. Once this is happening on regular basis, it is time to introduce the command "find the step".
- Important to remember to do this on a consistent basis after teaching it whenever you go up and down any stairs.
- If possible, expose your dog to as many different type of staircase surfaces. IE: wood, metal, marble, concrete, and those that are open. They may react and become more hesitant on different types of stairs. If so, be prepared to go back to the beginning of the training tips for that particular staircase.