

3. The Role of the Family

3.1 Adults

All Guide Dog owners are given training and instruction in the care and well being of their dog as well as the working aspect of having a Guide Dog. It is therefore important that the family's attitude and approach to the newly qualified owner should be one of support rather than contrary advice or criticism. The former will lead to confusion, and the latter may lead to loss of confidence. It is easy for the owner's family to expect too much too soon. It is therefore important to realize that it takes six months to one year (or, in some cases, even longer) for the owner and dog to overcome the inevitable settling-in troubles and begin to work together in complete harmony.

The Boss

The Guide Dog's behavior in the house is of great importance, and the dog must be aware right from the start of what is acceptable behavior. A consistent approach by the owner and members of his/her family is essential in achieving this. The owner should always be supported as the boss and should normally be the one to discipline the dog. However, in the temporary absence of the owner, another responsible family member should maintain the same standards.

Own Place

The dog should be provided with his/her own place within the house. It should be out of the way, draught-proof, and reasonably warm and quiet. This space need not necessarily be in a room on its own, but could be in a corner of the living room or some other room to which there is easy access during the day.

Visitors

Visitors to the house do not want a dog leaping all over them in greeting as they enter. It is important that control is maintained at these times. The dog should not be allowed to bark, become overexcited, or display a defensive attitude within the house.

Some dogs may bark when someone arrives at the door. Tell the dog immediately to be quiet. If the barking does not stop, contact GDTx immediately, as protective aggression is starting and this is potentially very dangerous.

Other Pets

When meeting other dogs in the house, the Guide Dog should enter first, then the resident dog should be introduced. Initially, both dogs should be on leads. Other pets should be introduced in much the same way. If at all possible, the introduction of two dogs should be carried out in an area which neither dog regards as its own territory (e.g., a park or playing field). Once the dogs have been introduced and have accepted each other, they can be taken back into the home together.

When dealing with cats, it should be remembered to allow the dog and the cat to approach each other in their own time. Forced introductions should never be made, as this will cause fear in either the cat or the dog, ultimately leading to confrontation. Close observation in the initial

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stages of introduction should be foremost in one's mind, with the emphasis on preventing confrontation.

3.2 Children

Try to ensure that children do not overpower, rush at, or corner the dog. Always allow the dog to make the initial approach and discourage the child from teasing or insisting on the dog carrying out obedience or other such exercises. **Remember, the dog's bed should be its sanctuary and children must not bother the dog there. Toddling children need careful observation to prevent this from happening.**

3.3 Feeding the Dog

Owners are given strict written and verbal instructions on all aspects of feeding their dogs, and they are the ones who are best able to monitor the food intake. The type and amount of food must be carefully controlled in order to ensure that the weights of their respective dogs do not increase or decrease. **If a dog is consistently overweight throughout his/her life, he/she might have to retire early because of premature deterioration of his/her heart, liver, or other internal organs.**

Members of the family must not give extra feeds or occasional tidbits. The dog should not associate the family's eating or food preparation with that of its own. It is important that a routine is developed in the dog's life whereby it is fed:

- At the same time every day.
- At a time which is convenient to the routine of the household.
- At a time which is not linked in the dog's mind to its return home from a particular daily walk (e.g., arriving home from work).