



GOING HOME

Going home with your new Pilot Dog can be both exciting and stressful. The purpose of this lecture is to discuss best practices for acclimating your Pilot Dog to your home environment.

This lesson will explain:

- Importance of gradual break-in period
- Routes
- Establishing relief/feed/sleep/obedience routines
- Introductions and ground rules for family/children/pets
- Managing household behaviors
- How and when to contact us

Importance of Gradual Break-in Period

It is important that your dog's introduction to your home and members of your family (including other pets) should not be a traumatic experience. For this reason, the following points should be kept in mind and implemented when you arrive home:

- Try to avoid having a “welcoming committee” waiting for your arrival. Stick to members of your household only so that your dog is not overwhelmed or confused.
- Remember that your dog will need to relieve himself soon after your arrival home. For this reason, you might begin your tour in the yard with your dog on a long leash.
- Ensure that members of the family do not overpower the dog. Let your dog make his own introduction to them.

Routes

- It is critical that you begin working your new Pilot Dog on routes that are very familiar to you. You want to set the dog up for success to continue to build the working relationship that you have started in class.

- Initial routes should be simple—around the block, simple left turns and right turns, small crossings. Any work errors should be handled as they were in class.
- When you first return home and acclimate the dog to new routes, you should increase the rate of food reinforcement for curbs. You can return to random reinforcement as you and your dog achieve success on familiar routes.
- When you can do one route with confidence, add another and build distance and complexity gradually.
- It is best to do these early routes independently. Friends and family who do not understand how a Pilot Dog works may be overly critical, or they may make unfavorable comparisons to a previous dog - both can affect your confidence.
- Remember to maintain realistic expectations of your new Pilot Dog. Trying to do too much too soon is a major cause of early adjustment difficulties. It takes 6 months to a year for a new team to become “seasoned.”
- Work errors, getting lost, and minor confusion on both your part and the dog’s part are normal and to be expected occasionally during the first few months at home. These should all gradually improve with continued practice.

Establishing Relief/Feed/Sleep/Obedience Routines

- Dogs do best when they have regular routines and know what to expect. We recommend that you keep relieving and feeding routines as close as possible to what they were at Pilot Dogs; however, dogs are adaptable and can adjust to a different schedule with a gradual transition.
- You should have a relief area already picked out for your dog. When you first get home, take him there right away. If he does not relieve himself, give frequent relief times until he does.
- We recommend that you continue to relieve your dog on a leash even if you have a fenced yard.
 - It allows you to know whether the dog has relieved himself as to reduce the chance of accidents.
 - It keeps the dog in the habit of relieving on leash so that he is still willing to do so when you need him to (for example, if you are traveling).

- It allows you to pick up feces immediately so the dog does not eat it and so you do not step in it.
- It allows you to know when the dog has diarrhea or any other relieving irregularity.
- Your dog needs four to five relief times per day at a minimum (about every 3-4 hours)—many dogs need more.
- Relieving problems in the home or in harness are usually caused by an inconsistent food and working schedule, not monitoring your dog's relief behavior, or an insufficient amount of relief time.
- Feeding should also follow the same schedule used at Pilot Dogs.
 - If there are other pets in the house, they should be fed separately. This prevents them from getting into altercations and ensures that pets are only eating their own food.
- Food may be increased or decreased as needed based on the dog's level of activity and body condition. The amount generally should not be changed more than a ¼ of a cup at a time. If you have concerns about your dog's weight, consult your veterinarian.

Introductions and Ground Rules for Family/Children/Pets

- Children should, if possible, be kept calm around the dog, although this can be difficult with very young children.
- Dogs should always be supervised around children—an enthusiastic dog can easily knock over a young child in an attempt to play.
- 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 or crate should be his sanctuary and children must not bother the dog there. Toddling children need careful observation to prevent this from happening.
- You should always be the dog's main caregiver—the one responsible for feeding, relieving, grooming, and practicing obedience routines; however, it is a good idea to have one other person in the house who knows how to do these things in case you should become ill and need assistance.

- Family members should not engage in regular, intense play sessions with your dog, as this can cause the dog to become overly attached to them.
- Everyone in the house should understand the ground rules and the reasons behind them: the dog is not allowed on the furniture, the dog cannot have human food, and the dog is not allowed to engage in rough-and-tumble play.
 - Family members in the house who are unwilling to follow the rules or who try to tell you how you should be handling the dog are another major cause of early adjustment difficulties.
- If you have another dog in the house, it is best that the two dogs meet on neutral ground, preferably outside the house on the sidewalk or in the driveway.
 - The other dog should be on a leash and handled by a family member or friend.
 - It is normal for the two dogs to sniff each other. Behavior that should be addressed if displayed by either dog during the first meeting includes growling, snapping, mounting, and overzealous sniffing if it causes the other dog to become fearful.
 - The two dogs should enter the house on leash once they have sniffed each other and appear to be calm. Ideally, you want the “new” dog to enter the house first.
 - During the initial first few weeks after returning home with a new Pilot Dog, you should not allow free play with a pet dog until routines and a good work ethic have been established.
 - This can take up to a few weeks, and only once you and your Pilot Dog are working effectively as a guide dog team should freedom be allowed in the house.
- Another dog in the house is generally good company for a Pilot Dog and problems are relatively rare.
- Formal introductions to cats can be difficult unless your cat is very docile and dog-friendly, but cats can usually take care of themselves. They will hide until they are comfortable and they will not usually hesitate to swipe the dog if they feel the dog is being inappropriate.
 - Cats in the house can stimulate a dog’s prey drive, especially if they try to run from the dog; if the dog attempts to chase the cat, you should give your dog an appropriate correction.

- The cat will feel more comfortable if it has a safe place to hide where the dog cannot reach it.
- Serious problems between cats and Pilot Dogs are rare, although dogs will often try to eat the cat's food or get into the litter box if those items are not secured out of the dog's reach.

Managing Household Behaviors

- The dog should not be given immediate freedom in the house; he should gradually be given freedom, one room at a time and always with supervision, just as he was in your room at Pilot Dogs.
- You should plan a location for at least one tie-down in your house so that you have a place to confine the dog safely during the adjustment period. Many people also choose to use a crate, which is a good option if you have the room.
- Make sure your house is “dog-proofed” by taking the following steps:
 - Cover or restrict access to trash cans.
 - Ensure that food is not left on counters or tables within the dog's reach.
 - Secure items such as remote controls, cell phones, hearing aids, laundry (especially socks and underwear), and shoes that the dog may chew on.
 - Store and take medications in an area the dog does not have access to.
 - Prevent access to any hazardous materials such as antifreeze, batteries, cleaning products, and poisons.
- We suggest keeping the dog on leash or tie-down for the first 4-6 weeks; it is much easier to prevent undesirable household behaviors from occurring than it is to fix them once they have become habitual.

How and When to Contact Us

We will contact you the Monday after you return home and 2 weeks after graduation for an update. We encourage you to try to work out minor issues on your own using the techniques that worked for you in class. Part of becoming a solid working team is learning how to fix problems on your own; however, we also do not want you to struggle with something with which you are having no success fixing on your own.

If you are becoming frustrated and feel you have tried everything, if you feel that you are in danger because of something the dog is doing, or if you are experiencing severe household behavior problems, please contact Pilot Dogs at 614.221.6367 and your call will be directed to the training department. Please do not contact your instructor directly, since we do not want your question to go unanswered if your instructor is unavailable.