

Puppy Raising

Stairs and steps

Quick links

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Why

Watch this video where a guide dog owner explains how and why steps and stairs can be un-nerving, particularly when going down them.



Knowing your puppy

Your puppy will have periods of uncoordinated movement as they grow and develop. Their limbs grow at different rates, their ligaments and joints are very loose, and it will take time and experience to fully develop their awareness of how to control and move their legs.

We therefore ask that puppies under three months old are not given access to stairs and are always carried up and down them. They can however, step onto very low but raised objects as described in sights and sounds to build their confidence and sense of their own movement.

After three months of age, you should give them managed and moderated access to stairs to begin with to help minimise the risk of them falling. Once they demonstrate that they can walk up them safely without risk of falling they can then do them alone. The number, difficulty and incline of the stairs will play a part in this, as well as the number of times per day a puppy is using stairs.

If within your home your young puppy needs to use stairs frequently to access the outdoors (i.e. for toileting) then it is important to limit their stair use and carry them on occasions. As puppies get older and larger, they will become more familiar with using stairs however, it is still a good idea to keep an eye on how often and when they are using the stairs.

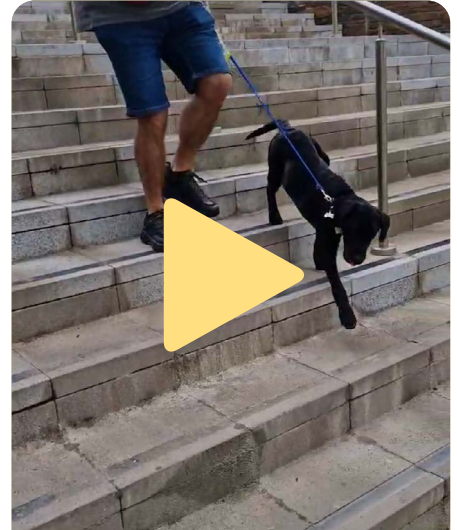


**Video: Steps
and stairs.**



Managing for success

- Start with easy stairs within your home or in another familiar environment.
- Choose stairs that only have a few steps and non-slip surfaces to begin with so that your puppy can gain confidence.
- If using stairs in a public place, choose a location that is quiet and has good lighting to avoid trip hazards.
- If your puppy is on a lead, ensure they have enough lead to move at their own pace if they are unsure.



Video: Steps



Teaching foundations

Make sure you are always in a safe and stable position when around stairs and steps. Be prepared for your puppy suddenly moving in any direction by ensuring you are balanced.

- If your puppy is on a lead, lengthen it.
- Let your puppy sniff and investigate the stairs themselves.
- If they don't investigate themselves, put one foot on the first step as your puppy will likely approach forward.
- As they move forward, reward them on each step. This will help slow them down and teach them from the beginning to walk steadily on stairs, rather than rushing up or down.
- Repeat this a few times, reducing the frequency of reward so that it is given just when they have completed the set of steps.

Progression

- As your puppy grows, both physically and in confidence introduce them to new stairs or steps, and then steps with different surfaces. If they are used to carpeted stairs, introduce them to stairs without a back or glass stairs that overlook the floor below.
- Practice stopping on steps so that they build confidence with being there, instead of rushing up or down.



Being a partnership

- Try not to lure your puppy with food rewards or your voice. Luring or encouraging in this way can cause conflict. Your puppy may be driven by the food and move towards it, but then panic because they aren't comfortable with the stairs yet.
- When out and about with a younger pup, you may need to have a plan to carry your puppy if a flight of stairs is too much for them, or to change your plans if that's not possible.
- This exercise also develops your puppy's proprioception (sense of their own body movement) and encourages calmness. It is much harder, and requires more confidence, to do things slowly when you're a young dog, so any opportunity to slow things down is worth taking.



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