

Grooming & Handling

Building Your Relationship on Trust



Your dog needs to learn to trust you not to hurt him when you are grooming or handling him. You also need to be able to “see” your dog through your hands, feeling for lumps and bumps, ticks and brambles in the fur.

Before you embark upon this exercise, you need to know if your dog has any current health issues that make him uncomfortable with handling on certain parts of his body. If there are such areas, please work with your veterinarian to have any underlying medical issues resolved.



Picture: [wikihow.com](http://www.wikihow.com)

Carefully expose your dog to your hands on different parts of his body. You may have to start with a hand, or a finger, or not even touching but just approaching from a couple of feet away. Immediately give a treat for accepting whatever level of “handling” (hand in vicinity of, or finger lightly touching, some body part) that you can get that the dog is distinctly comfortable with, and then proceed from there.

Make sure never to surprise or trick your dog! If you do, you will lose his trust. Instead, let him see the hand approaching every time. Counter-condition by letting each moment of touch (or hand approaching) predict and be followed by a yummy treat. Do not progress too fast. If the dog avoids (weight shifting backwards, turning head away, staring, closing mouth, etc) do not push ahead, but make it easier for your dog. The goal is to have your dog ENJOY the handling, not just tolerating it!

It is important to give the treat AFTER the touching / handling: touching/handling predicts the treat, and thus handling becomes less worrisome. If the treat comes before the touch, there is always the possibility that you may ‘poison’ your treat – the treat now predicts something unpleasant.

Your dog will tell you himself when, and how much closer, he will be able to tolerate your hand. Progress at your dog's pace, not yours! **See protocol on the back of this sheet.**

Tooth Brushing

Tooth brushing is an often overseen part of dogs’ daily grooming, but the lack of dental hygiene can cause severe health problems as the dog gets older. Please do not delay in introducing your dog to daily tooth brushing.

Like with all other things, please do not use force. Just present the toothbrush, perhaps with some canine toothpaste on it for flavour, and let him investigate it and chew on it. Chewing on the toothbrush is the first step towards learning about regular brushing.

Please ask your veterinarian about professional cleaning of your dog’s teeth. Historically established plaque should be removed by your veterinarian.

Protocol for Desensitization & Counterconditioning to being touched

Stand or sit down with your dog in a comfortable place. You can play some calming music in the background, if you like.

1. Start with a part of your dog's body that he is relaxed about having touched, for example the shoulder. "Relaxed" means that he does not even turn his head away, he does not lean away and he does not close his mouth.
Do this:
 - a) Hold five high-value treats in your treat hand behind your back.
 - b) Reach towards a part of your dog's body that he is comfortable with having you touch, but **ONLY AS CLOSE AS YOUR DOG IS COMFORTABLE WITH AND DOES NOT AVOID AS ABOVE**, and hold still.
 - c) Give a treat with your treat hand.
 - d) Take both hands away.
 - e) Repeat until all five treats are gone, then take a break for a minute.Gradually work your hand closer to your dog's body or body part in question, one inch at a time, but only progress when your dog is totally relaxed and does not show any signs of avoidance or discomfort. **NEVER FORCE** - if you do, you will break the trust. Your dog needs to be able to trust that you will let him pull away *at any time* and you will then stop what you are doing.
2. Once your dog is happy with having one part of his body touched by your hand, work your way gradually towards other parts of his body, until he is relaxed about all parts of his body being touched.
3. Once you have achieved #2, start working with implements such as grooming brushes, towels, nail clippers, etc. Let your dog see and smell the item before you touch him with it. If your dog does not like the item, go back to step 1 but with the implement in your hand, and work your way through the protocol.
4. Ask your dog if you may lift a paw, or handle an ear, or touch the muzzle. You ask him by putting light pressure on the back of the wrist, on the back of the ear, or on the bottom of the chin. You still hold the treats behind your back until your dog "says yes". Then, with your hand on the body part but **WITHOUT ANY KIND OF RESTRAINT**, give the treat. Then remove both hands. If your dog pulls away, go back to #2.

If any of the above training steps are not working, go back and spend more time on the previous step. Patience is a virtue here. The moment you lose your patience and force your dog, you will have broken the trust. Just remember how helpless you feel at the dentist's when they lean you back in that chair!

If you are still having trouble, call us!

For when you need to get a procedure done in short order, you can use the technique with the Kong or spoon seen in this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5tnC0QnRPE&>

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