

Handling

Dogs must learn that handling in sensitive areas is necessary but also no cause for concern. Dogs who have not been desensitized to handling in certain areas such as their feet, under their tail, inside of their ears or their mouth may become nervous or aggressive when handled in these areas. Some dogs can become even more sensitive as they age or if they have medical conditions that cause additional irritation. Start the process of training your dog to accept handling as soon as possible. The following is a list of guidelines to help you desensitize your dog to common handling.

Sensitive Areas

Start by introducing your dog to any equipment you will be using. Equipment can include nail clippers, brushes, towels, cotton balls, etc. You will also need a large supply of the most delicious treats you can find.

Start with the least uncomfortable activity and begin associating this activity with the delicious treat. If you are starting out with a puppy, you should take time daily to massage each of the sensitive areas while your puppy is relaxed, including ears, tails, toes, and opening their mouth. If your puppy is very active, try after meals or before bed time. Some dogs are more relaxed in the morning so this might be a good time to sit down with your puppy. As your dog or puppy gets acclimated to the feeling of each of these areas being touched gently, you can begin adding some pressure in each of these areas. Do not add so much pressure that your dog pulls away but just a little at a time so that he gets used to varying degrees of handling.

Here is an example of paw handling:

- Touch the paw, feed a treat.
- Pick up the paw, feed a treat.
- Pick up and hold the paw, feed a treat.
- Pick up the paw, handle a toe, and feed a treat.

For ear handling and cleaning:

- Touch the ear, feed a treat.
- Lift the ear, feed a treat.
- Touch inside of ear with cotton ball, feed a treat.
- Wipe inside of ear with cotton ball, feed a treat.

Here is an example of how to desensitize to brushing:

- Show your dog the brush and give a treat.
- Touch your dog with the brush and give a treat.
- Run the brush down the back of your dog upside down (bristles up) and give a treat.
- Turn the brush over and give a treat.
- Finally, run the brush down the back of your dog with the bristles down.

Stop while your dog is happy and enjoying the treats. Do not continue if your dog begins to pull away. If your dog pulls away you are teaching resistance to handling. Always allow your dog to move away if they are inclined but take note of what caused your dog to move away and the next time you do training do not go that far again until you are sure the dog is ready.

Collar Grabs

Collar grabs can also be essential to teach your dog that when his collar is grabbed, great things happen. You do not want to do any jerking or pulling motion when introducing this to your dog as it might cause him to pull away and reinforce resistance to collar grabs.

Teaching your dog to accept a collar grab can help you if your dog's leash breaks, if he gets loose without a leash on, if you need to move him from one place to another or if you need to hold onto your dog to allow someone else to pet him or examine him.

Training your dog is as simple as grab the collar, feed, and repeat. After many repetitions of just grabbing the collar you can begin to lead your dog 1-2 steps while holding the collar, feed and repeat.

Repeat each of the handling exercises many times and in many different locations so your dog understands that these things happen all the time and they are no big deal!