



HANDLING & GENTLING

Teaching a pup to calmly accept handling is a vital part of puppy parenting in order to prepare them for all manner of daily life. Pups that do not have the benefit of this early intervention may grow up to be fearful and/or aggressive when having collars and/or harnesses put on and taken off, when picked up and/or moved, when groomed, when examined by the veterinarian, and when being restrained. To follow is a list of some of the areas of handling to be addressed:

- 🐾 Gentle handling around all areas of your pup's body (be especially gentle with areas dogs tend to be more sensitive about, such as muzzle, ears, and feet).
- 🐾 Putting on and taking off a collar or harness.
- 🐾 Taking hold of your pup's collar or harness while it's on.
- 🐾 Putting on and taking off jackets, sweaters, and protective booties.
- 🐾 Grooming
- 🐾 Mild forms of restraint.

Despite dogs propensity to bond with their family, it's a mistake to assume that all pups will be tolerant of essential handling, touching, and restraint. As such, helping our dogs learn to be comfortable and receptive to a variety of ways of being handled is a priority.

PRACTICE SESSION TIPS:

1. Keep sessions brief (about 1-3 minutes).
2. Plan for multiple sessions a day so your pup can build strong learning muscles.
3. Have your pup on a light leash.
4. Have a variety of high value treats broken into tiny pieces. Verbal praise may be sufficiently reinforcing for some dogs, but tiny, healthy food rewards are highly recommended when setting a foundation of learning.

Beginner Handling Exercises:

1. Offer your pup a tiny food reward as you gently and briefly touch an area of their body that you think they won't take issue with.
2. Take both hands away at the same time.
3. Repeat a few times and then move on to another part of their body to practice in the same manner.
4. Watch for subtle (or not so subtle) signs that your pup may be uncomfortable. If there is any resistance or signs of stress (flinching, pulling or moving away, etc.) stop touching for a moment.
5. Try offering a higher value treat and touch for a briefer moment.
6. Many dogs are most sensitive around their head, neck, and feet. Be especially gentle and brief with sessions around these areas.
7. The goal is to work towards being able to fully examine your pup's body as a veterinarian might do in a wellness exam. But, there is no race to the finish line with these exercises. Be patient and consider that baby steps in the right direction mean you are giving your pup the time they need to make a super positive association between being touched/handled and getting a terrific reward.

Intermediate Handling Exercises:

- 🦷 When your pup shows no signs of concern with having a particular body part touched for a very brief moment, gradually increase the length of time you touch that body part while offering a food reward.
- 🦷 Work towards gentle manipulation/examination of each body part. For example, gently holding your pup's paw and looking between the pads, or gently holding your pup's ear flap, lifting it and looking into their ear.

Don't expect your dog will be tolerant of all handling by all people. Dogs have preferences and opinions just like we do. The goal is to help best prepare them for reasonable and appropriate

Collar Grabs/Gotchas

1. Teach your pup to accept being grabbed by the collar, which is something you will need to do many times in daily life and in an emergency situation.
2. Say "gotcha" and gently taking hold of your pup's collar at the same time as you offer a treat from the other hand.
3. Repeat many times throughout the day.
4. Very gradually increase the force with which you grab the collar (to better simulate how you might grab it in an emergency). For some pups you can move on to this after a few days, for others a few weeks or more. This is dependent on your individual pup's personality, on how diligent you are at providing brief practice sessions every day, and on your handling skills.
5. Very gradually increase the speed at which you approach your pup prior to grabbing the collar (to better simulate how you might behave in an emergency).

Be willing to make accommodations for dogs and what they are currently comfortable with by avoiding putting them in situations they are not well equipped to handle and at the same time work in brief training sessions to help them develop more positive opinions.