
INTRODUCTION TO GENTLE HANDLING

Building up your dog's confidence and resilience to being handled is an important life skill, which will greatly benefit your dog when they need to visit the vet, groomer or when you need to administer medication or carry out husbandry responsibilities at home.

Positive Association to Being Handled Exercise

In this exercise you are trying to create a positive emotional response from your dog when being handled. The dog learns that being handled is a positive experience because they receive treats, or they find it relaxing getting massaged and receiving affection from people.

- Start slowly when your dog is in a calm and relaxed state.
- Gently massage and stroke your dog. Most dogs will enjoy the massage.
- Gradually move to all parts of your dog's body including the feet, toes, and ears.
- If at any stage your dog pulls away when you touch an area, this just means that you may have to go at a slower pace and gradually build up their tolerance for being touched in this area.
- You can provide your dog with a quiet enrichment item such as a licki-mat or food stuffed toy, or calmly offer treats intermittently throughout the exercise.
- A lot of dogs will find the nice calm massage and calm interaction rewarding and you may not need to provide treats at this stage.

Handling Tips:

Go at your dog's own pace, if you see any signs of stress or your dog is not comfortable being touch in a certain area, go back to a place where they are more comfortable and gradually work your way up to the less comfortable area.

Practice the handling exercise in a familiar and calm environment and work towards generalization, by practicing the exercises with other people and in different environments as your dog gets more comfortable with handling.

DO NOT forcibly restrain a struggling dog! This will cause the dog to give up and appear to be calm, but they are in fact shut down and this is detrimental to the human-animal bond and your dog will lose trust in you as their care giver.