

Del Ray Animal Hospital
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HANDLING AND FEEDING EXERCISE

The first goal (level 1) of handling exercises is to teach the puppy to tolerate and enjoy all types of handling from family members and friends. The second goal (level 2) is to teach the pet to tolerate more intensive, firm, or unfamiliar forms of handling that might be necessary for restraint, grooming (including nail trimming, ear cleaning, and combing) , teeth brushing, veterinary care, or that might arise in greeting or play with new people or children. If the puppy can be trained to associate these forms of handling with rewards and play, it may not become problematic when they are experienced later. The goal is to ‘proof’ the puppy to prevent it from getting upset if it is handled roughly or caught by surprise.

Similarly, feeding exercises are intended to help the pet accept and enjoy approach and handling during feeding.

PRECAUTION

1. Avoid any type of handling during these exercises that causes the pet to become agitated or anxious.
2. If you observe threats or aggression during any of these exercises, seek guidance from a trainer or behaviorist before proceeding.
3. Reaching out for the puppy should always be positive. Hand contact must always be considered a friendly (non-aversive) gesture. Never hit the pup or roughly grab its muzzle or neck.

HANDLING EXERCISES

A. Level 1: Teaching tolerance

The goal of handling exercises is to accustom the puppy to accept and enjoy all types of handling from friends and family members.

1. Begin by only working with the puppy when it is calm.
2. Inspect its ears, mouth, paws, belly, and hair coat.
3. Initially interact for only one second and end with praise or food (the pup’s dinner time is a good time to do this).
4. Anticipate the puppy’s mood and reaction and always stop before the puppy stops you.
5. Frequently repeat the exercises, gradually lengthening the interaction time.
6. Always praise the puppy whenever it doesn’t resist handling.
7. Progress slowly enough to avoid eliciting resistance, aggression, or anxious behaviors. Don’t ever force the puppy to endure handling, especially if it seems uncomfortable or stressed.

B. Level 2: Proofing puppies for more intensive handling.

1. Act jolly, offer food or a toy.
2. Gently touch, pet, stroke, or massage various areas of the body and collar while giving the pet food or a toy.
3. Gradually increase the intensity of touching, pushing, patting, and grasping different areas of the body (e.g., face, feet, muzzle, ears) as the puppy gets more used to it.
4. Always praise the puppy and intermittently give favored treats whenever it doesn't resist handling.
5. Start with short sessions, anticipate the puppy's attention span and stop before the puppy gets tired of the exercise.
6. Consider your dog and lifestyle and adapt and progress with your handling exercises (gentle, positive, reward association) to what the puppy might one day be expected to encounter (e.g., brushing the teeth, lifting and carrying, bathing, grooming, cleaning ears, wiping feet, nail trimming, etc.).

FEEDING EXERCISES

Food bowl handling is intended to teach the puppy to feel comfortable and even learn to enjoy the presence of people while it is eating or near its food bowl.

A. Don't put the food bowl down and ignore the puppy while it eats. Sit down, visit with the pup, talk to it, and spend some quality social time.

B. Food bowl handling (teach that the hand is coming to give, not to take away).

1. Walk by the puppy while it is eating and drop a piece of canned food, meat, or cheese-flavored treat into the food bowl. Ask visitors to do the same.
2. Occasionally reach down toward the bowl and put a food treat in it.
3. Place the bowl in your lap or on the floor in front of you. Feed the puppy. Handle the food, gently pet the puppy. Act jolly.
4. Take the bowl away. Put a highly desirable food treat in the bowl and give it back.
5. Gently touch and handle the puppy while putting a food treat in the bowl.
6. Occasionally make the puppy work for a handful of food by asking it to sit for each piece.