

HANDLING ROUTINE

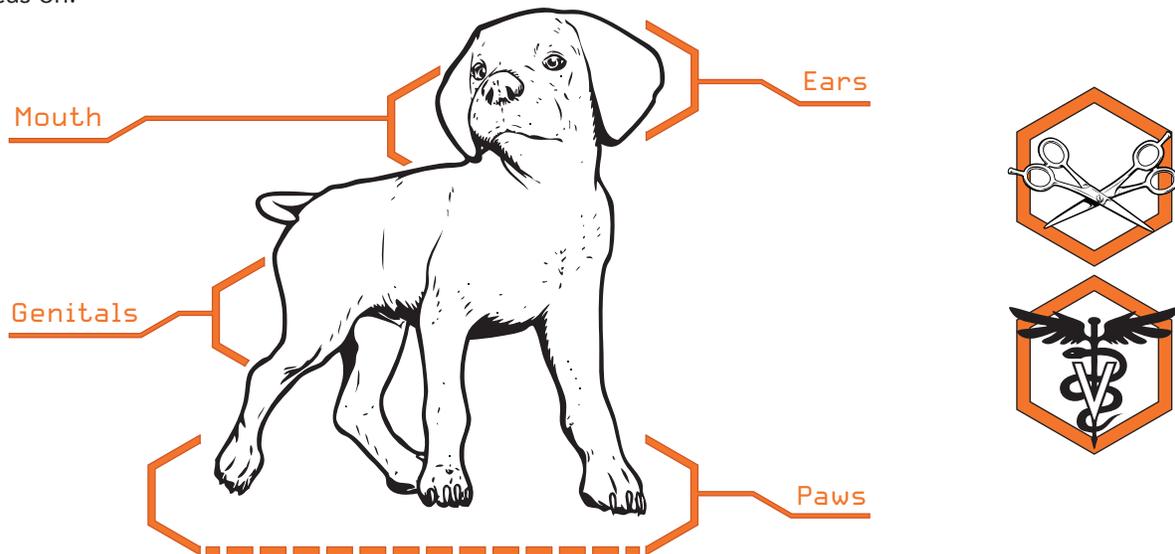
Getting your dog acclimated to being touched in a variety of ways is one of the most urgent things you can teach your dog. Unfortunately, ignoring or inadvertently encouraging fear and aggression is among common owner mistakes.

Touching your dog regularly not only strengthens your bond, but it also allows you to detect lumps, bumps, and irregularities. It can alert you to pain-sensitive spots, minor injuries, ticks, bites, and stings. There shouldn't be any place on your dog that you can't touch!

Likewise your vet and groomer will be handling your dog a lot. It's important to get all of those sensitive areas desensitized. You don't want your dog to feel like vet or groomer visits are punishment; they should just feel like a part of life.

Ideally, this conditioning routine is started on puppies. The younger the better! With constant handling and gentling your puppy should be just like a rag doll in your hands, and in the hands of your vet or groomer. With adolescent and adult dogs though, you'll probably have a more difficult time. Keep at it! Be patient, move slowly, and use a ton of positive reinforcement. You can do it!

We will focus on:



THE ROUTINE

Get some really good food rewards, sit down with your dog, and literally move snout to tail; touch and hold a body part for a second, give it a little thumb massage, and move on.

**One ear treat,
other ear treat,
paw treat,
paw treat,
paw treat,
paw treat,
open the mouth treat,
"fiddle the goolies" (two treats for that),
look them in the eyes,
give them a kiss on the nose and a little hug, and they're done.**

Depending on how sensitive your dog is, you may only be able to do this routine once per session. *You may not even be able to get through the whole thing the first time.* That's all right. DON'T GIVE UP! Keep working your way through it!

PRO TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Your dog may choose to move away. Choice and consent are big parts of making the habituation process successful. If your dog chooses to disengage, that's ok. Just be like "That's fine, but I won't interact with you while you're over there." When they choose to reengage, reward that and continue at the level that they're comfortable with.

Give them calm, neutral-toned feedback. Model the energy you want. Give authentic praise, but keep it low-key. Use what we call the "N.P.R. voice," (like the sedate announcers on National Public Radio). If you're too peppy you'll likely increase arousal. There's a time for up-time energy, this just isn't it. Like Han Solo said, "Fly casual."

Let's add to that last one: don't reprimand, don't get mad, don't get confrontational. That's a super way to make any resistance worse. Then they start to expect an argument...and many dogs get ready for battle when someone's going to touch them. You may even be able to bully them through a routine but you're just holding a lid over a geyser. It's gonna blow eventually and if you're not there it'll be your vet or groomer, or it'll be someone else. Be resolute, sure, but stay cool. Don't be too emotional. This work is supposed to *decrease* that internal pressure so the geyser becomes a fine mist. Let them take a break if they need. If they get cranky, do it later and chunk it up into smaller sections.

Puppies (and even sassy adolescent dogs) may mouth on you while you're doing this. You just calmly give them appropriate feedback, and brush their mouth off of you. "Hey, quit it. That doesn't work on me." Even in these instances don't let them "activate" you. Keep "flying casual." I know that's easier said than done, but use that advanced human brain and keep it together. You'll never get control of your dog if you can't control yourself!

ALWAYS ERR ON THE SIDE OF KINDNESS AND SUPPORT. Your dog's not resisting to make you mad, or to "be the boss." Being touched and handled isn't something they ever experience in nature, so this is all alien and foreign.

Treat each body part like it's a separate little training exercise. That means we'll use markers and feedback just like we do with anything else: "Good" for while we're handling a part, and "Yes!" for when we're done with a part and they get their reward. Take a look at our **Marker Training** video on YouTube for deeper info on markers.

Massage ears, and paws during cuddle times. This will classically condition them to associate being touched with affection. See our **Touch Tactics PDF** for more info on how to do this like a pro!

Once you're going through the whole routine smoothly, start extending the amount of time you hold and/or handle the ears, paws and mouth. Waggle the treat in front of their nose and count up to three. And then to four the next time. And then five. And onwards up to ten. If you can hold each part and count to ten, you're paws and shoulders ahead of nearly 99% of all the dogs your vet and groomer will see!

After each session there will be some accumulated stress. Your dog will probably give a shake-off or a sit-and-scratch behind the ear maneuver. Make sure to follow up with something active and fun with them so they can burn off the stress chemicals in their body and replace them with good ones. Play tug or fetch, do some quick behaviors they know well with super reward events, or let them have some zoomies around the living room while you cheer them on. This is important! Extended reward events are completely appropriate here to anchor in those positive emotional responses. Take a look at our video about **Modular Reward Events** on YouTube for more info.

REMEMBER:
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THAT YOU CAN'T TOUCH!**