



Handling Exercises

Why Work on Handling?

Because you want your dog to cheerfully accept being touched by many different people (children, friendly strangers, the groomer, the vet, etc.) in many different situations. Also because it will make handling safer you, your dog and whomever else interacts with your dog.

How to Work on Handling

- Work SLOWLY. Do several short sessions every day.
- Repeat each step many times.
- Only move to the next step when your dog is comfortable with the current step. Look for a relaxed body, enthusiastic tail wags, no mouthing of your hand, and your dog not trying to avoid your hand but instead eagerly awaiting a treat to be dispensed
- Always pair any handling with treats. A treat should be on given as close as possible to the time of the handling, if not at the exact same time.

Tail: Tails are magnetic to children; they simply have to grab those waggy things and pull. Vets need to lift tails for temperature checks.

1. Run your hand down the tail. Treat.
2. Run your hand down the tail, then hold the tail for a second. Treat.
3. Run your hand down the tail, then gently lift the tail for one or two seconds. Treat.
4. Imitate a child by pulling on the tail a little more firmly for two to three seconds. Treat.

Paws: You have to be able to clip your dog's nails, dry his feet when he comes inside after playing, and check for burrs. Vets will also need to examine the paws during appointments.

1. Touch a paw. Treat. (Do each step with all four paws).
2. Gently hold or cup the paw. Treat.
3. Hold the paw for three seconds. Treat.
4. Hold the paw and gently press as you would for nail trimming. Treat.
5. Hold the paw and gently probe between the toes. Treat.

Neck: You and your family need to be able to grab your dog's collar without startling him.

1. Reach out and stroke the neck. Treat.
2. Reach out and touch the collar. Treat.
3. Reach out and hold the collar. Treat.
4. Reach out, hold the collar, and move your dog a step or two. Treat.

Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation

Walnut Creek, CA • (925) 256-1273 • (800) 567-1273 • arlife.org/pet-care-and-behavior-library



Head: People are going to pet your dog's head, sometimes without asking permission.

Reach out and lightly touch the head. Treat.

Reach out and pat the head. Treat.

Reach out and stroke from the top of the head down along the neck. Treat.

Ears: Ears dangle or stick up—either way, children find them irresistible. You have to be able to clean your dog's ears, and a groomer might have to trim around them. Vet will also have to look in your dog's ears to check them.

1. Touch an ear. Treat. (Do each step with both ears.)
2. Lift the ear. Treat.
3. Lift the ear and rub it with light pressure. Treat.
4. Lift the ear and rub it with a little more pressure. Treat.

Mouth: You have to be able to brush your dog's teeth, and the vet needs to be able to examine them.

1. Lift the upper lips. Treat.
2. Lower the bottom lips. Treat.
3. Fully open your dog's mouth as if you were going to give him a pill. Treat.

Tony La Russa's Animal Rescue Foundation

Walnut Creek, CA • (925) 256-1273 • (800) 567-1273 • arlife.org/pet-care-and-behavior-library