

How To Train Your Dog For A Lifetime of Stress-Free Grooming



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Is your dog a drama queen... or is she genuinely frightened of grooming? As professional groomers, it makes us sad to see dogs trembling, whimpering and snapping during the grooming process. It really doesn't have to be that way. Whether you've adopted a rescue dog with a history of bad grooming experiences, or you just want to give your new puppy a great start, there are a few simple things you can do to train your dog for a lifetime of stress-free grooming.



You know “the look”—the one your dog gives you when she knows you're about to make her do something she really doesn't want to do. Whether it precedes a visit to the vet or the groomer, you recognize the signs—ears back, tail down, and a set of sad puppy eyes—and it breaks your heart every time.

The truth is, you know you're only doing what's best for her; she needs to be cleaned and have her nails clipped. You may also have a breed that requires regular haircuts, so avoiding the clippers isn't an option. Some dogs need more maintenance than others, but they all need occasional grooming.

What's a good pet owner to do? How do you make sure your four-legged companion gets the care she needs without giving you that sad face? Fortunately for you (and your dog), there are simple steps you can take to make her grooming experience a good one each and every time, resulting in a healthy and happy pup, and a guilt-free puppy parent!

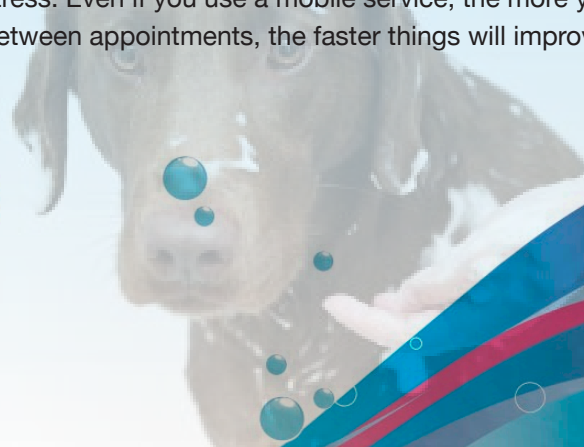
Starting Early

If you can, it's best to begin at a young age; as soon as you bring your puppy home, work on getting her used to being handled. Hold her, love on her, give her a massage, and play with her toes and nails. Get her used to being touched between her paw pads, and around her ears, eyes, and mouth. The more used to being touched she is, the easier a transition it will be when a groomer tries to work with her.

If you have an adolescent or adult dog who hasn't gotten used to being handled, don't worry! It's never too late to start. Just use common sense and introduce the new touches gradually. Don't force the issue when Fido gets nervous. Your pet needs to learn that nothing scary or bad will happen when her feet, paws and toes are handled. Positive reinforcement (treats, toys and praise) goes a long way here.

Keep in mind that much of the training and conditioning you do at home can be done at convenient times. You can work with your pet while you watch TV, during a play break in the yard, or before bed. If you have children, they can be taught to work with your dog as well; it's something the whole family can work on, and even a little bit helps!

Special Note: If you have a pet that has extreme anxiety over the grooming process, rest assured that she can be reconditioned with time, patience and training. We can work with your dog at every grooming appointment to show her what a gentle and calm experience it can be, and after a while, your pet will gradually become accustomed to being groomed. We highly recommend a mobile service for pets with intense fear of grooming, since being close to home, away from other animals, and in-and-out in a short period of time will significantly reduce their stress. Even if you use a mobile service, the more you can help in between appointments, the faster things will improve.



Playing with Paws

One of the most stressful parts of a groom for some dogs is when it comes time to clip their nails. If you're the owner of a dog who thrashes about and screams when someone tries to clip her nails, you know how awful it is to see your pet so stressed. A dog who has a bad experience having her nails clipped may take time and training to change her behavior. We see dogs (and owners) who are terrified of having the nails done, but it really doesn't have to be that way.



You may not realize just how often a groomer has to touch your dog's feet, but there are several times during a groom when that happens:

- Groomers will have to pick up each paw to clip your dog's nails.
- We should be able to get a good look at the paw pads and in between the toes to check for debris or tangles in the fur.
- Just like people, your dog needs to be washed thoroughly - including between her toes and in her paw pads.
- We need to be able to use the blow dryer on her feet to leave her completely dry.
- If your pet gets a haircut, we need to be able to safely use clippers and/or scissors around her feet.



Work on getting your dog to give you his paw

Being comfortable having their paws handled goes a long way toward reducing the stress.

To have the smoothest grooming process possible, your pet should be comfortable with having her feet held and manipulated for up to 60 seconds at a time. She shouldn't

mind you touching individual nails or massaging gently in between the toes so the individual paw pads get touched, and she should be comfortable bringing her paws forward or backward for you. If your pet isn't okay with any of that, try starting out by giving a reward of some kind as you just touch her foot while it's on the ground. Work up to being able to pick up the paw, hold it, and eventually touch individual toes/nails. Keep it positive with toys/treats/praise as you go. Even the smallest baby steps will be helpful with grooming over time.

Teach your Dog to "Stand"

If you've ever taken a basic obedience training course with your dog, you may remember the "stand" command. Unfortunately, most pet owners don't reinforce this command as much as they do "sit," "come" or "stay." For us groomers, *stand* is what we really need your pet to do, at least part of the time she's with us. (*Exceptions are made for older pets or pets with health concerns.*)



For best results, pets need to stand calmly during parts of the grooming session.



We need to be able to see your pet in her natural stance to give her a proper, even and smooth haircut. We also need to be able to brush and dry the whole dog - including her tummy, legs, haunches, and tail. This can be difficult to accomplish if your pet wants to lay down or sit for the whole groom! If your pet is trained to stand on command, her grooming experience is

sure to go smoother; she'll be in a comfortable and familiar position, and won't be bothered with us trying to make her stand when she doesn't know why or what that even means. Good groomers will work on teaching your pet to stand when they have them in their care, but practicing at home will help to reinforce your groomer's training and keep it fresh in your dog's memory.

How to Teach Your Dog to “Stand”

1. Start with your pet in a sitting or laying down position. Hold a treat out in front of her nose, and lure her up into a standing position by moving the treat away from her horizontally. Reward with the treat when she gets up to a standing position.
2. Repeat the above motion several times, and begin adding the command “stand” so your pet will relate the motion of standing up to a reward and the verbal command.
3. Gradually remove the treat from the scenario. Try using just your hand motion (without a treat) and the verbal command to get your pet to stand up. Reward with praise and an occasional treat for positive reinforcement.
4. Try it without the hand motion. Work on getting your pet to stand with only the verbal command. Continue with positive reinforcement!

Here’s a video that provides a visual on how the stand command works:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcPnuCeHxfA>.

What’s that Noise?

One of the necessary aspects of grooming that stresses out some pets is the noise of our equipment. The dreaded blow dryer, the clippers, and even the painless “click” of a nail trimmer will make some pets nervous. It’s helpful to remember that everything groomers use is designed specifically for pets; the noise level of the dryer is appropriate for your pet, and we groomers take the proper precautions to make sure no harm is caused to your pet at any time during a groom. We’re all about gentle grooming, but even that requires some noise!

Just as you socialize your dog with other animals, children, people, and environments, there are things you can do to help your pet be more comfortable with being on a grooming table. Pets are frequently around lots of noisy household items—vacuums, hair dryers, washing

machines, dishwashers, etc. Out of the house, your dog may encounter other noisemakers like bicycles or skateboards. Use positive reinforcement at home (treats, toys, praise!) to make sure your pup is plenty comfortable around these things. It will go a long way in helping her enjoy the gentle massage of a grooming blow dryer!

Puppy’s First Groom

When is it appropriate to have your puppy groomed for the first time? As soon as possible! We recommend you wait until the puppy is four months old and is up-to-date on vaccinations. If she’s in need of a grooming prior to that, you should call a mobile groomer to avoid direct contact with other dogs and make sure the groomer knows your puppy hasn’t had all her shots yet. Getting started with grooming at an early age (well before any matting in the coat starts up) will give your pup a head start on good grooming behavior.



The most important part of a puppy’s first groom is that it be a positive experience. Puppies will be squirmy, nervous, playful or just plain silly their first time on a grooming table, making it a challenge for a groomer to get that perfect haircut. That’s okay—they’re puppies! A gentle grooming service will take the time to work with your puppy, teaching her some basic obedience, slowly getting her used to the noises and handling, and rewarding good behavior with lots of love and treats. Set your expectations at a reasonable level; don’t expect too much of your puppy or your groomer. It may take a few sessions to get your pup used to what’s expected of her and what she can expect, but taking the time to make sure she enjoys being groomed will pay off with years of stress-free grooming in her future.

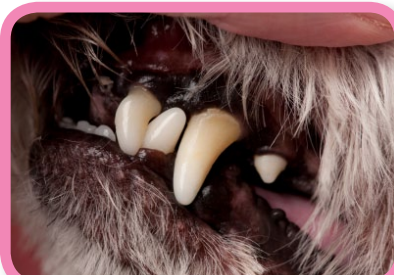


Dental Health

Have you ever tried to brush your dog's teeth? Some pets take to teeth brushing rather quickly, but others take time to get used to all that handling. If your dog puts up a big fight the first time, don't be discouraged; she'll become accustomed to having her teeth brushed with time, patience, and practice.

Why Brush?

One of the best things you can do for your pet's wellbeing is to keep up with her dental health. Healthy teeth are important for the rest of your pet's body; the bacteria found in tartar buildup can enter the bloodstream and cause problems with the kidney, liver, heart, and neurological system. Good dental health can literally add years onto the life of your pet!



If your pooch calmly grants access to her mouth and teeth, good dental hygiene becomes easier for everyone involved. You shouldn't have to put your pet in a headlock to brush their teeth!

Tips on Tooth Brushing:

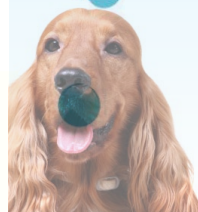
- Just like the rest of the grooming process, frequent handling is a big part of getting your dog used to having her teeth brushed. Pull up on her lips so you can clearly see the gum line all along the front and sides, and pull back so you can see the molars well.

- Always use products that are marked for use on pets; human tooth paste and breath products can be harmful to animals. Also, using a beef- or poultry-flavored toothpaste be much more acceptable to your dog!
- Try to brush your dog's teeth at least twice per week. Don't worry if she initially puts up a fuss; she'll get better over time. Reward with treats and praise, and be persistent. You may only be able to brush her teeth for a few seconds the first time, and maybe you won't be able to get to those important molars right away. Keep working at it; with positive reinforcement and help from your groomer, you'll eventually be able to scrub away at your dog's teeth for a couple of minutes at a time.

Dental Health Options

You may have heard several different terms from your groomer or vet with regard to dental health. To help you understand the various options available, we've compiled a list of some of the common techniques:

- **Teeth Brushing** – This is just like what we do at home. Using a soft bristle brush and a paste designed specifically for pets, teeth brushing helps to prevent tartar buildup.
- **Breath Spray** – This is sometimes used to freshen breath, but doesn't go far in preventing tartar buildup.
- **Oral Irrigation & Gel Products** – A combination of sprays, gels, and the use of a water pick are used to loosen the plaque buildup on the teeth and rinse out the mouth. Trained professionals use these products to gradually reduce buildup and prevent future tooth decay.
- **Scaling** – This is like the teeth cleaning you get from a dental hygienist. Special tools are used to scrape the tartar buildup off the teeth. Scaling, which will actually remove plaque buildup in one sitting, should be done by a certified professional. It can be done with a non-anesthetic service or while your pet is under general anesthesia by a vet.



When to Hire a Trainer

If the basic training tips we've recommended you do at home are too much for you, or if your dog isn't responding, we recommend you hire a trainer. There are many reasons why hiring a professional dog trainer may be right for you. The best part about having a trainer, though, is the opportunity it presents for you to have a better relationship with your pet.



A good trainer will work with both you and your dog to help you communicate better with each other—so you'll know what your dog needs, and your dog will know what you expect from her. Trainers can help with all sorts of behavioral problems, both grooming- and non-grooming related, and they can also provide guidance on basic obedience and socialization. They can train in your home or in a group environment, and can target their training to you and your pet's specific needs.

What to Consider When Hiring a Trainer

- Be aware that there are two basic schools of thought on dog training: (1) positive reinforcement and (2) dominance/pack mentality. Educate yourself on both and discuss with your candidate trainer. We're big fans of positive reinforcement (like the methods in this booklet), and believe it is the kindest and most effective way to help pets learn what we expect from them.
- What kind of experience does your trainer have? Does he have any specialty, or any limitations on breeds or behavioral issues?
- Be upfront and honest with your trainer. Let him know what issues you specifically want addressed, and what challenges he may expect from your pet.
- Be patient with your trainer. Many behavioral issues (aggression, fear, anxiety, etc.) may require time and hard work to correct.

A stressed dog is much more likely to snap and bite.

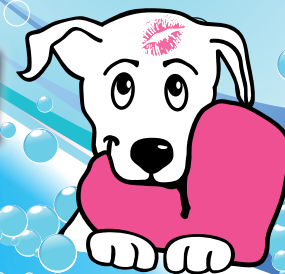
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