

Teaching Your Pet to Love Being Handled

When your pet doesn't like to be handled it can be very challenging. Giving medications, doing nail trims and teeth brushing can turn into a battle. It is also important to be aware this can progress into bigger stressors for your pet. A surprise tail pull, paw grab, or well-meaning hug from a child could potentially make your pet uncomfortable enough to bite.

Teaching your pet to enjoy being handled can be accomplished through **classical conditioning**.

The majority of puppies do not usually have a negative emotional response to having a veterinary exam but introducing touch gradually in a manner that does not produce stress is important preventatively.

Classical conditioning is a type of associative learning. For veterinary exam exercises we want touch to predict tasty treats, and over time the touch alone will produce a positive emotional response in your pet.

GUIDELINES FOR CLASSICALLY CONDITIONING YOUR PUPPY TO HANDLING

- ✓ Go slow, the point of these training sessions is to teach your puppy that veterinary handling can be a fun and predictable game.
- ✓ Timing is everything. Ensure you touch your pet in the area you are working on **FIRST** and then give the treat.
- ✗ Never start with the part of their body that makes them uncomfortable. Start with the part of their body that is likely to cause the least amount of stress, such as petting their back. Then work up to more potentially stressful body parts such as paws.
- ✗ If your puppy is displaying any signs of stress **STOP**. Go back to a body part that they are comfortable with and end the session on a positive note. For future session consider breaking the steps down more for the concerning body part(s).

A TIP TO TAIL EXAM INCLUDES:

1. Lifting both the right and left side of their lips to look at their teeth
2. Looking in your pets right and left eye
3. Flipping over their right and left ear and looking at their pinna (inside ear flap) and ear canal
4. Rubbing your hands over their entire body checking for lumps and bumps, including their neck area
5. Lifting their tail up to assess their anus (slowly)
6. Lift up one paw at a time to inspect the bottom of their paws
7. A hug around their neck (your elbow should sit just in front of their throat) with one arm and your other arm hugs under their belly (restraint)

BODY LANGUAGE THAT CAN INDICATE STRESS

- Panting
- Lip licking
- Looking away
- Pulling a paw back
- Tail tucked
- Ears back
- Walking away
- Yawn



THE GOAL OF THESE SESSIONS IS TO HAVE THE VETERINARY EXAM BECOME A FUN AND PREDICTABLE GAME FOR YOUR PET!

TRAINING SESSION EXAMPLE

1. Lift lip to look at teeth (right side) then give a treat
2. Lift lip to look at teeth (left side) then give a treat
3. Lift right ear and look at ear flap then give a treat
4. Lift left ear and look at ear flap-“yes” and a treat

Training sessions can be 2-5 min/daily. You do not need to go through a whole mock exam in one session. Take your time and go at your puppy's pace.