

## Handling and Feeding Exercises for Your Puppy

These exercises are designed to help you teach your puppy that human hands always deliver great things! By practicing the following, your puppy will relax and feel happy and content when adults or children pet her or come near her food. This will also help prepare your puppy for handling that comes along with vet visits, trips to the groomer, etc.

### Important Tips

- ✓ Always begin any handling exercises with familiar people. Work up to practicing with friends and then strangers.
- ✓ Go slowly! Don't push too hard or do anything that causes the puppy anxiety or stress.
- ✓ If your puppy freezes, growls, shows teeth or bites during any of these exercises **STOP immediately!** Call us for help.
- ✓ Hands coming towards your puppy should **always** be a positive thing. The puppy should look forward to approaching hands as they are anticipating a very lovely event happening.
- ✓ Never tap or hit your puppy or roughly grab her muzzle or neck.

### Handling Exercises

Begin by working with your puppy when she is calm – after she has had a play session and gone potty. A good time to practice handling is before you give your puppy dinner. Always use a soft voice and praise during the handling. Keep sessions very brief and end on a good note.

- Sit with your puppy and gently stroke her ears, mouth, paws and tail for a count of 5. Keep the session very short! Always end with praise and a food treat before she gets tired of the handling.
- Repeat several times a day and slowly add onto the count so that the puppy learns to relax under your touch for longer periods.
- Your puppy will likely encounter brushing, lifting and carrying (if small breed), paw wiping, nail trimming, cleaning ears etc. Once your puppy is totally calm and relaxed with the handling exercises above, you can start to incorporate these things into the short sessions. Use life to help you – if your puppy has wet paws, wipe them **gently** and give your puppy a treat.

**Tip for success:** Always quit while you are ahead! Make good judgment calls: if your puppy is in a playful mood or too tired, don't practice handling. If you go slowly, you will avoid causing stress and you won't have to deal with resistance and wriggling.

### Feeding Time

The following exercises will help your puppy enjoy the presence of people while she is eating. You want your puppy to learn that having people around while she is eating is a good thing - not something to be worried about. You want her to learn that there is no need to guard her food from people.

1. Initially, when you feed the puppy, just remain standing calmly and softly praise as she eats. Don't stare!
2. Next time, calmly walk by the puppy while she is eating her food and drop a higher value item - such as a drop of wet food, or small treat - into the bowl from above (don't reach in, just gently drop the treat. If it lands on the floor next to the bowl, that's fine). You can ask other family members to do this too. Remember, you are NOT reaching into the bowl, just dropping goodies in or nearby.

*Continued...*

3. Then, occasionally reach down and place a treat into the bowl with your hand while your puppy is eating. Immediately stand back up again (don't linger with your hand in the bowl). Do this in a relaxed, matter-of-fact way.
4. After a few days of repeating step 3, reach down and gently take the bowl away to add the treat. Immediately put the bowl back down again.

Ideally, your puppy should begin to wag her tail and look up whenever anyone approaches her food bowl. She's expecting a tasty treat to be given to her in addition to her kibble and is not expecting her food to be taken from her.

If you have any signs of worry from your puppy that doesn't go away quickly (such as freezing and standing over the food bowl, growling, showing teeth etc.) then please call us immediately for help.

**Need help? Call our free pet behavior help line at (503) 416-2983.**