

GROOMING CHALLENGE

Learning to love being groomed.

Grooming can be a stressful experience. Think about it from your puppy's perspective: All those new objects like scissors and nail clippers. Also a bath. And loud, potentially scary things like clippers and hair dryers. And if she goes to a salon she'll be left with a stranger for a good part of the day. That stranger will handle her a lot – holding her still, touching her all over. In short, unprepared, a puppy might find grooming and the grooming salon alarming. But it doesn't have to be that way.

If you want your puppy to grow up loving being groomed, whether by you or her groomer – instead of stalling out and refusing to enter the bathroom at home or the salon, and then shaking and shivering the rest of the day from the experience – you need to get her ready.

Handle your puppy, and get others to handle her, too.

Think about all the ways you and/or the groomer will need to handle your pup: holding her feet, ears, and tail, touching her all over, and restraining her. Do these things yourself on a regular basis. Teach your dog to love this kind of handling by noting any areas of discomfort (when she shies away, pulls her paw away, tries to leave) and pair them with treats:

- Get treats ready.
- Touch the body part for a second, give a treat. Repeat.
- Gradually increase the time and firmness of your touch, continuing to pair with treats.
- Go at your pup's pace, only increasing time and firmness when you can see your puppy is actively enjoying the game.

Introduce your puppy to the equipment.

Don't let the first time your puppy sees nail clippers or hair clippers or hears the hair dryer be when you really need to use them. Introduce her to these things gradually. For example:

- Get treats ready, but keep them out of sight.
- Show your dog your hair dryer, then give her a treat. Repeat several times.
- Pull the dryer a good distance away – 10 feet, say – turn it on and off quickly, toss her a treat. Repeat.
- Gradually come closer with the dryer (or, better yet, let your puppy come closer to you), continuing to treat. Then give her a break from the dryer and stop the treats. When you turn the dryer back on, start treating again.
- Gradually leave the dryer running longer, continuing to treat whenever it's turned on.
- When you finally blow a bit of air her way, go back to a single second, treat, and then slowly work up from there.

GROOMING CHALLENGE (CONT)

Make bath time fun.

Bath time is no fun for a dog who's fearful or struggling—or for the person trying to do the bathing. Several warm up bathing sessions can go a long way toward successful baths for the length of your dog's life.

- Get out some treats. Really fabulous ones. Think leftovers from dinner last night—something truly special.
- Put your puppy in the tub or sink. Give her a few treats and lift her back out. Do this enough times that she is visibly excited to be getting back in—eagerly looking out for those treats.
- Turn the water on for a second, away from your dog. Give her a treat. Repeat many times. Eventually let the water run a little longer before you give a treat.
- Spray your dog's feet for a quick second and give her a treat. Repeat.
- Slowly work your way to getting your puppy a little wetter, continuing to treat.

Training Tip: Early bath time can be easier with two people: One to do the work, the other to give the treats.

Training Tip: Go at your puppy's pace. Make sure she is wagging her tail and having fun. If she seems stressed or nervous, back off to an earlier, easier, less scary step.

Training Tip: Don't rush it. You may not actually give your puppy a true bath the first two or three times, depending on how quickly she relaxes and seems to enjoy this game. That's fine—if the first session is just getting in and out of the tub, so be it. The point is to take things slowly and get it right for your puppy's lifetime.