

This Is How Visionaries Cuddle Their Puppies When They're Very Young

A visionary sees the end from the beginning. You'll fit the definition of one if you do this when your pup is very young. It'll be like giving him his own private chill pill — comfort throughout his life even when he encounters various situations that often lead to tension and stress.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- New puppy parents should begin handling delicate body parts right away to desensitize their pet to human touch
- It's important to get puppies used to having their teeth, gums, ears, eyes, muzzles, paws, toes and the back half of their bodies handled
- Very young dogs typically have no ear problems, so they can go quite a while without anyone ever taking a peek in there
- Sit is one of the first commands to teach. You can teach your puppy to sit and stay with her head up by gently holding her neck in that position for a few seconds
- A puppy who has learned to calmly accept handling will enjoy a lifetime of low-stress veterinary and grooming experiences

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published January 1, 2017.

There are a few things new parents can do to get their pups used to being handled. Your veterinarian, groomer, trainer, pet sitter and anyone else who will care for your dog during her lifetime will love you for it if you can get puppy comfortable early on with human touch.

Getting Your Puppy Used to Having Her Mouth and Ears Handled

When you're cuddling your new puppy, you pet her and stroke her and kiss her all over her warm, wiggly little body. While having all this fun, it doesn't occur to most people to also investigate the inside of puppy's mouth.

But believe it or not, inspecting her mouth by putting a finger in and gently feeling around in there helps to desensitize her.

This is not only relaxing for her once she's used to it, it's also the first step in getting her comfortable with having her teeth brushed at home and her mouth examined at the veterinarian's office.

Another body part you might not think to investigate when you're petting your pup is inside her ears. Very young dogs typically have no ear problems, so they can go quite a while without anyone ever taking a peek in there.

One day when she's a bit older you or your veterinarian or groomer will inevitably need to clean those ears or treat an ear infection, and puppy may be a bit nervous and uncooperative because she's not used to having that particular body part handled.

If she gets comfortable having her ears touched as a puppy, your dog won't be frightened by it later in life.

It's Also Important to Touch Puppy Around Her Eyes and Muzzle

Sometimes when we need to do something for a pet, we tend to sort of grab them and hold them down, and that's when they become alarmed. The idea is to be able to touch all areas of your puppy's body without making her nervous.

It's important to also touch around her lips and mouth. This may seem a bit strange to your pup because she's not used to it. She'll be thinking, "What are you doing? Your finger's not supposed to be in my mouth!"

But once she's comfortable having the outside of her mouth touched, you can begin slipping a finger inside and moving it around her gums to desensitize them.

Other Areas to Desensitize — Paws, Toes, and Backend

Another body part to include during puppy petting sessions are the paws and toes. It won't be long before your pup needs the first of many nail trims she'll endure throughout her life, and pedicures can be extra stressful for dogs who never learn to get used to them.

To desensitize a puppy to nail trims, you need to touch and massage each paw, and each individual toe. When you get to the nails, give each one a gentle pull or tug to get pup accustomed to feeling the slight pressure that comes with having a nail clipped.

What you're teaching her is she has nothing to fear when someone handles her paws or breaks out the nail trimmer. Most dogs never grow to enjoy having their paws handled, so the goal is simply to remove the fear factor and encourage cooperation through desensitization.

We also want to accustom puppy to having the back half of her body handled. So during petting sessions, run your hands over her back, hips and the area beneath her tail in case there's ever a need to do some cleaning back there.

Introducing Puppy to Her Brush

Another thing new guardians should do is desensitize their puppies to grooming tools like the brush you plan to use. Many pups have very sensitive skin, so it's important to get them used to the sensation of brush against skin with what we call "ineffectual brushing."

This involves "brushing" puppy's coat with the back of the brush first before actually putting bristles against skin. This helps her get used to the sensation of having an object moving around on her body.

Teaching Your Puppy to Do This Will Impress Your Veterinarian

Desensitizing your pup's mouth, eyes, ears, nails and skin is one of the best things you can do at home to prepare your new puppy for visits to the veterinarian. One of the first commands to teach your dog is to sit.

You can teach your puppy to sit and stay with her head up by gently holding her neck in that position for a few seconds. This will be a huge benefit when it comes time to draw blood for **diagnostic testing**. Your veterinarian will love you for it, because when a dog can calmly hold a sit and stay with her head up, we can get the blood drawn quickly and painlessly.

Desensitizing a puppy as early as possible sets her up for a lifetime of low-stress handling, grooming, and veterinary procedures.
