

LEVEL TWO HANDLING

Dog allows the handler to handle his ears, tail, and feet. This may be done on a table or on the floor. There must be minimal fussing.

DISCUSSION: No matter what else a dog has learned, what amazing behaviours she can perform, a dog that can't be safely handled in everyday life and minor emergencies is nothing more than a wild animal living in your house. Cleaning ears, cleaning teeth, cutting toenails, expressing anal sacs, trimming, brushing, bathing, checking injuries -- husbandry requires being able to handle the animal, never mind daily interaction. When people can handle your dog casually and completely without worry about a reaction, your vet will love you, your groomer will love you, you'll save a ton of money on grooming, and a ton of worry that the dog will be lashing out at neighbours. Bear in mind, though, that what we're doing here is training the dog out of MINOR fussing. If your dog is actually trying to bite you or other people, please get help from a competent professional trainer.

EASY BEGINNINGS: Whether or not your dog is good at being handled, treat this as a distinct behaviour that needs to be trained. You may hit a time when he doesn't want you to touch a sore paw or something and you can fall back on your training.

The dog is comfortable with you petting her somewhere on her body (if you can't pet her at all, you need a professional trainer to work with you). Touch her there ten times, clicking and feeding for each touch. Don't touch lightly -- you're not trying to tickle her. Most animals will accept a solid touch (not a slap!) better than a tickly touch. Gradually start moving your touch toward her ears. As you get closer to her ears, work a bit on duration of touch. Click for a one-second touch. Click for a two-second touch. Work up to about 10 seconds. When you get to her ears, fondle them gently, but keep clicking. If she likes being fondled, you didn't have a problem, but if she doesn't, you want to keep rewarding her.

Move gradually down her body to her tail. In the beginning, it doesn't matter if she's sitting or standing. Run your hand down her tail, hold her tail, pull (lightly) on her tail. Don't stop clicking, and every click, of course, gets a treat.

Move very slowly down her legs to her paws. Be sure that she's comfortable and eager for the next click before you go further. When you get to her paw, hold it on the ground if she's left it there. Hold it off the ground. Play with her toes and her toenails.

While you're doing all this, pay very close attention to how she feels about it. Don't go three inches down her leg if she isn't totally "in the game" at two inches. You're not trying to see how far you can get today, you're trying to teach your dog to **relax and accept the handling**. Pay close attention to the duration of your touch as well. Remember that when you change one thing, you have to make everything else easier, so if she's good with you touching her for 10 seconds 3 inches down her leg, when you go for 4 inches, cut your duration down to nothing -- just a touch -- and build back up to 10 seconds before you move on to 5 inches.

PROBLEM SOLVING:

SHE MOVES AWAY FROM MY TOUCH! Instead of YOU touching HER, try getting HER to touch YOU. Remember the Come Game from Level One? Play it again. This time, put one hand out in front of you so she has to brush against it to get the treat from your other hand. Then tell her that you have to pet her ear for a second before she gets the treat.

SHE JERKS HER FEET! Of course she does, dogs hate having their feet fussed with, especially if they're thinking about toenail cutting while you're doing it. Go further up her leg to where she's NOT jerking, and work slowly back down again. Be sure you aren't pulling on her leg. Think about

pushing her leg and foot slightly toward her body rather than pulling them out toward you.

SHE TUCKS HER TAIL UNDER! That's a natural reaction as well. Go back to the base of the tail, or somewhere along her topline where she isn't worried about your touch, and work from there. Or wait until she knows the StandStay and then go back to her tail again. It'll be easier when you can ask her to Stand. If you want to know more about teaching her to Stand so you can bring her tail up, read the article on training the conformation [Stack](#).

ADDING A CUE: I don't really use a cue for this, other than Stay. Dogs DON'T generalize well, but Stay seems to be a cue they easily generalize. Once she understands Stay for the DownStay, the SitStay, and the StandStay, you'll notice that she'll start freezing in whatever position she happens to be when she hears the word.

CONTINUING EDUCATION: Ears: look in her ears, poke around in her ears with your finger, lift her ears up, pull them down, fold them over her eyes ("you can tie 'em in a knot, you can tie 'em in a bow....."), clean them gently with a Q-Tip. Tail: lift it up, pull it down, straight out behind, express her anal sacs (do this in the bathtub, don't say I didn't warn you), hold it at the base, hold it at the tip, wag it for her. Paws: pull them forward, pull them back, pull them out to the side (gently, remember they're not SUPPOSED to go in this direction), wash them with a washcloth, dry them with a towel, scissor the hair out between the pads (blunt scissors if you don't know what you're doing)(and remember you aren't trying to cut the hair, you're trying to train the dog to have the hair cut), and of course, cut the toenails. I can't begin to tell you how much more you'll enjoy your dog if you take some time NOW to teach her to have her toenails cut so you don't have to get in a wrestling match every time they need to be done!