

PREPARING YOUR PUPPY FOR GROOMING AND HANDLING



When you get your puppy home, you will need to prepare him or her for life in the human world. They will already have hopefully had some handling and socialisation and are now ready for the next exciting step of entering your home.

It is important that you get your puppy from a good breeder who has bred for both good genetics and temperament - be really careful you are not unwittingly supporting the puppy mill business by doing your research first and not simply buying a puppy because they are cheap.

Assuming your puppy is used to being around people and being handled, you'll find you may already have been given a head start by the breeder - for example, a good Poodle breeder will have already given the puppies their first experience with the clippers around 4-5 weeks. Other breed puppies should already have had a bath, a brush and comb and may have had a little trim around the face by the time you get them. Ask the breeder what they've already done with the puppies, and be wary if the pups have not had proper handling.

Some puppies may not have had much handling, so you will need to put time in with them getting them used to everything they will face in the future. Obviously this is very important for those dogs who will be clipped throughout their lives but all dogs will be bathed and their nails trimmed for example, so getting puppies confident and happy right from the start is vital.

Puppies are said to have a 'fear stage' or apprehension of new things at around 16 weeks, therefore the more you can do as soon as you get your puppy, the better!

Getting your puppy happy and accepting of the grooming process does more than just help him at the groomers. All the following exercises and training have positive side effects when it comes to visits to the vet, general training and also life in the family home. Its not 'just' about grooming, its daily husbandry that will benefit your dog throughout his or her life.

Failing to help prepare puppies means dogs being booked into the groomers at 9 months to a year, matted and unprepared. The poor young dog then undergoes a very scary experience with procedures they are not used to with other dogs, strange noises and a potentially difficult clipping experience to get rid of mats. Early visits and preparation results in a dog with a lovely coat who happily goes to the groomer on a regular basis - and nobody gets stressed or - worse - injured.

FIRST THINGS FIRST - TRAINING & SOCIALISATION BASICS

As soon as you get your puppy, his education with you begins and its your job to make things as easy for him as possible. Training should be positive and reward-based so that he associates new experiences with good things rather than predictors of pain or fear. Training has moved on a lot in recent years, and it is now accepted that teaching dogs is best done by showing the dog what you want and rewarding him when he gets it right with treats or toys, not punishing the dog

when he gets it wrong. A couple of great free booklets written by Dr Ian Dunbar, the pioneer of reward-based dog training can be downloaded from the links below - these help you understand lure reward training and how you can get training straight away:

<http://www.dogstardaily.com/files/BEFORE%20You%20Get%20Your%20Puppy.pdf>

http://www.dogstardaily.com/files/downloads/AFTER_You_Get_Your_Puppy.pdf

Any training class you attend really should be a positive reward-based class - go and watch before you join so that you can see what goes on and what the atmosphere is like. Any signs of punishment, lead jerks or manhandling of the dogs should be avoided as this sets them up to potentially be scared of training and can sour the relationship between you and your pup.



Another great source of training videos is a trainer called Emily Larlham - Kikopup on Youtube - who goes through wonderful basic training as well as fun tricks you can do with your pup. Check her out here - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-qnqaajTk6bfs3UZuue6IQ>

Socialisation refers to the process of introducing your puppy to new sights and sounds in a way that is positive and non-threatening. It is not socialising, which can be something very different! When it comes to grooming, this means introducing things in a slow and gentle way - suddenly plunging a puppy into a full on groom including clipping can be far too much for them, and be very scary. As a result they can become very difficult to groom and may even develop a phobia or be aggressive. Shorter visits with positive experiences are the way to go.

Grooming Preparation

Your puppy is going to need to get used to various procedures and associated pieces of equipment such as:

-  Handling and Restraining
-  Combing/brushing
-  Bathing and drying
-  Coat clipping and stripping
-  Ear Cleaning
-  Nail Clipping



HANDLING AND RESTRAINING

Handling is a crucial part of your puppy's upbringing - not just for grooming but for visits to the vets and also for day to day life with your dog as he grows up. Your puppy will need to happily accept touch all over his body; this means stroking and holding everywhere, including in between the pads on their paws. Handling should be part of daily life for him, coupled with treats so that it predicts good stuff. Remember that your vet will need to handle and examine your dog too so practice all the following:

- Stroke him all over from his nose to the tip of his tail
- Touch and press his feet and in between his pads
- Look at his teeth, lifting up his lips so you can see them
- Open his mouth so you can see inside
- Look in his eyes, clean them with cotton wool
- Look in to his ears and gently clean round the outside with cotton wool
- Check his genitals - trust me, you need to be able to!!
- Ask your puppy to stand, and support him with an arm under his belly - sometimes this can stress them when the groomer does it.



The other part of this equation is to ensure that your puppy can handle being restrained - can you hold him in your arms? can you hold him like a vet would do in order to take his heart rate, look at his teeth or even take his temperature?

Another key part of teaching a dog boundaries is to teach him what the collar means - often we just put the collar on and expect the dog to know what to do. Instead, help him out by teaching him that pressure on the collar means to back off it, not push into it. Reward him for even slightly backing off the pressure, and for moving left or right when you ask him to. As a trainer, I see many dogs who can get very distressed if you take their collar and react in ways varying from panicking to becoming aggressive.

Time spent teaching him what the collar means will pay dividends -

- Your dog will not panic when you have to grab his collar in an emergency
- Leadwalking will be easy peasy to teach if he understands to back off pressure
- The vet will be able to take his collar when examining him
- When the groomer uses the nooses or belly straps, he will not panic and will be much easier to groom

There's a lovely video from the Guide Dogs for the blind teaching collar cues to really young puppies here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2r-00C8gYY>

COMBING AND BRUSHING

As with handling, getting your puppy happy with being combed and brushed is something they need to learn for their future, especially if you have a dog with longer hair. Pups should be brushed as soon as you get them, making it something that happens on a daily basis.

Good breeders should have already started this work for you, and will be able to advise on the right type of brush to buy. Go gently and quietly, just brushing a little at a time, and pair it with yummy treats so that your dog doesn't see the brush and run away! You may go through some little temper tantrums, but gently persist doing a little every day so that soon your puppy is happy to be brushed and even enjoys it!

One of the most important things is to brush and comb your dog's fur *before* it tangles. Just as you don't wait until your hair is all tangled to brush it, you should brush him to stop tangles happening. If you wait and then try to comb tangled fur, your dog will learn to dislike it and become difficult.



Learn to brush the coat properly - some coats, particularly what are termed double (eg Collie, Husky, Pomeranian) or wool (Poodle and many poodle crosses) can be tricky to get to grips with. It is easy to think you have brushed the coat properly, and it seems soft and tangle free but mats are forming underneath. To prevent this happening, make sure you brush right down to the base of the coat, section by section; this will both detangle the coat, prevent mats forming and also remove dead undercoat which can become matted up. There's a little video here on my facebook page showing how to use a slicker and comb correctly - [Brushing Video](#)

If you are at all unsure, ask your groomer the best way to brush your dog and the right tools to use. This way you can keep your dog looking fantastic and avoid the coat having to be shaved off to remove mats. To understand why mats form, why they can't be brushed out and what do do about them, please check out my [article](#) on dealing with mats.

BATHING AND DRYING

Pretty much all dogs will need to be bathed and dried; they may not go to a groomer, but even short haired dogs are not immune to the allure of fox poo and your nose won't be either! So get your puppy happy with being washed and dried as young as possible - we trained our Miniature Schnauzers to stand in a cat litter tray from puppyhood as well as being bathed. This way if their feet were dirty after a walk, we could pop them in, wash their feet, dry them and let them into the house. As we didn't have wood downstairs but carpet, this was very handy!



Top tips for bathing your puppy are:

- Use tepid water - dogs cannot regulate their temperature as we do, so the water needs to be cooler than we would have it.
- Use proper dog shampoo - a dog has a different pH to their skin and using human shampoo can irritate them. Do use puppy shampoo when they are young.
- Try to purchase good quality shampoos - Sodium Laurel Sulphate can irritate skin, so if you can, get shampoos without them.

- If you are using a shower head, make sure the pressure is not too high, and run it into the bath/sink/container first so the puppy can get used to the sound and the water.
- Wash from the tail toward the neck first - going straight for the head can be frightening for a dog.
- Go very gently on the head - keep ears closed to the head or block the ear entrance with your hand to avoid water going in and if you can, tilt the head down so that water does not go up their nose.
- Rinse in reverse, so from the head back toward the tail.
- Let them shake, and then use a good microfibre towel or a 'chamois' style one which can almost suck the water out of the coat.
- For dogs with longer coat, avoid rubbing with the towel since this can cause tangles and make it difficult to comb.
- Get your puppy used to hairdryers - start with it on low and at a good distance so as not to scare him. The groomer will use a high velocity dryer or blaster, when he goes, so getting him used to the presence and sound of a dryer now will really help.
- If your dog is really frightened by the drier, turn it on in the room far enough away so that he is curious but not scared and then very gradually move it nearer.
- Something called a 'Happy Hoodie' can help if your dog is scared by the noise of the drier. It looks like a snood around their head and ears, and works to dampen the loudness.

COAT CLIPPING AND STRIPPING



Most dogs visiting the groomer will be attending in order to get their coat clipped, scissored or handstripped (where the old coat is removed by hand). This means that they are going to have to be comfortable with the noise, vibration and sensation of clippers, the noise and feel of scissors (many dogs are quite scared by them), as well as having to stand still whilst the coat is cut around their face, paws and body.

It's a pretty big ask. So help your puppy by preparing him as best you can, otherwise his first experience of all of the above may be at 8 months, and it can put him off grooming for good if you are very unlucky.

Obviously you may well not have dog clippers to hand at home but there's still much you can do to help your puppy be well prepared. If you have any beard trimmers you can use these, or failing that you can use an electric toothbrush:

- Turn them on at a distance and pair it with treats so that your puppy gets used to the noise
- Turn them on and off nearer your puppy and then, once he or she is okay with that move on
- Run the trimmer/electric toothbrushes over your puppy when they are turned off
- Turn them on, hold them in your hand and touch your puppy with the other
- Turned on, hold them in your hand and touch your puppy with that hand
- Run the trimmers, turned on, over your puppy

You will also need to teach him to be happy with scissors - sometimes the noise of the scissors 'snipping' can worry them, so get him used to it all around his body. You can also simulate the

use of scissors around the face with a teaspoon (yes, really!) which will accustom him to a silvery object around his face safely.

Another tip is to accustom your puppy to having his beard held and his head steadied - this is what the groomer will need to do in order to safely trim around his eyes and face. Just take hold of his beard gently, hold for a second and then release. Try not to release when he's struggling or he will learn that this is what to do if he doesn't like it; instead build it up gradually, and give him a treat as you do it. He will soon be happy about having his face held - some dogs will rest their heads in your hand and almost go to sleep.

Make sure you reward him frequently, go slowly and do not overface him.

EAR CLEANING

Keeping your dog's ears clean and clear ensures that he is unlikely to develop ear infections which can damage his hearing and cause him significant distress. Handling his ears and looking in them regularly means you can keep them free of debris and further reduces the likelihood that you will have a fight on your hands should he ever need ear drops.

Dampen cotton wool and very gently wipe around the outer edge of the ear canal - take care never to poke anything into the ear and also never use cotton buds (or q-tips) to clean in there.

As your puppy grows up, you can purchase ear cleaner which is designed to clear the wax; simply pour onto cotton wool and gently wipe the ear clean.

This is especially important with dogs that have a hairy ear canal or those with heavy ears such as Spaniels. Having the ear canal closed to the air as such dogs do, can render them open to infections and mites. Make sure you regularly check your dog's ear for anything out of the ordinary - look for debris, excessive wax, brown or black buildup inside the ear, discharge or foul odour. These can be signs of ear mites or infections or other common ear problems - a nice webpage on possible problems can be found [here](#)



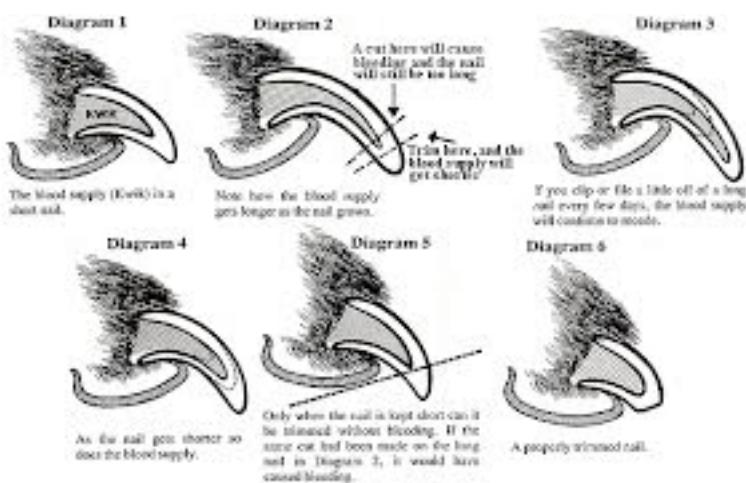
NAIL TRIMMING

This is an area where starting early REALLY pays off - many dogs will get extremely upset at having their nails trimmed later in life and it can result in genuine distress, aggression and upset. Teaching your puppy to have his nails handled and fussed with whilst you hold his paws will really help him become confident and happy to be checked and trimmed. Good breeders will have already been trimming their puppies nails to remove the hooks from a very young age. Ask them to show you how, and just take the tips off in order to ensure the puppy continues to be confident and happy about the process.

Why trim nails? Allowing your dog's nails to grow too long can cause the toes to spread and form unnatural angles which in turn puts stress on the ankle joints. This can affect his ability to walk and can contribute to joint problems as he grows up; plus in addition long nails can scratch furniture, carpets.....and people!

Take your puppy's paw in your hand and, holding the toe with your index finger and thumb bring the nail clipper up with your other hand ready to trim the nail. All your handling by now should mean he accepts this happily; if he does not, go back to handling his paws and nails until he is confident and happy.

You can work right to the point of applying pressure as shown in this nice little video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MuXwKqXTBsE&feature=related> if you're not happy to actually clip the nail. If, however, you're happy to, just take off the ends of the nail and no more. You may find that once your dog is out and about, their nails wear pretty well on their own - dogs running on sandy soil for example have their claws abraded by the surface and may not even need clipping. Dogs walked a lot on pavements also can wear their claws down sufficiently to not often need clipping.



To understand how much nail to remove, and why you should be careful, you need to understand the structure of a dog's nail. Inside each nail is the 'quick' or the vein and if you take off too much, the dog's nail will bleed and it will hurt him. It is therefore better to take off very little than to take off too much and risk 'quicking' the nail.

Handle and prepare your puppy for nail trimming a couple of times a week but do not actually trim the nails unless they need it - just close the clippers around the nail but do not cut.

Some people prefer to use a dremel or nail file. This can be helpful for dogs who are scared of the clippers and also for owners who are worried to use clippers for fear of quicking their dog. You do still need to exercise caution and not over dremel but it is an option for some dogs. You still need to go through a teaching process so that they are happy to cope with it - check the link below for an approach to use with the dremel.

Another fun thing you can do is to teach your dog to use a scratch board - this means that they will file their own claws (although this is only applicable to the front feet). This approach can be really great for dogs who are truly scared because they are in control and there's no touching or holding from the human involved. Here's a link if you fancy teaching it <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cbk97jKF9I0> and here's a nice article about a trainer re-teaching a fearful dog to accept the dremel and also trim their own nails <http://www.rover-time.com/teaching-a-dog-to-file-their-own-nails/>

CLEANING YOUR PUPPY'S TEETH

Although generally not included in a grooming appointment, it is something you should do regularly and getting your puppy accustomed to it is definitely best done when they are little. All the handling around their mouth and looking at their teeth is a perfect introduction to the next step - pressure and rubbing on their teeth.

Starting young will not affect the health of your puppy's mouth in the long term (they get their full adult set around 6 months), you will have a far greater chance of getting him accustomed to the process and it will be easier throughout his life.

Many people don't bother brushing their dog's teeth, but just like us they can develop tartar which in turn can cause gum disease (gingivitis) and eventually result in the loss of teeth. Not only are there health implications, but the cost and risk to dogs being put under anaesthetic for teeth cleaning and/or removal is pretty significant. Clean your dog's teeth often and hopefully you can avoid expensive and risky treatment.

There are specific dog toothpastes you can purchase which are flavoured with chicken or beef to encourage them to like the process. Human toothpaste includes fluoride and other ingredients that can be toxic to dogs - whilst we don't swallow toothpaste, dogs often do, so make sure you use the correct product.

To apply the toothpaste, you can buy toothbrushes specially shaped for dogs (if you don't have a dog brush, use a soft child's toothbrush). Introduce the brush gently and in small stages, or use finger brushes as shown here, but if your dog is very chewy or bitey you might be better off using a brush as it won't object to being chewed!



Here are the steps to get your puppy comfortable with having his teeth cleaned:

- Get your puppy happy with having his mouth and teeth handled, including having your fingers and hands in his mouth.
- Introduce the toothpaste - let him investigate the tube and like some from the tube and your fingers. You might need to try different flavours to find one that he really likes.
- After he licks the toothpaste, start to rub your finger along his teeth and gums whilst you lift the lips out of the way. This will be the motion you'll use if you're going to use a finger brush, and will help transition to a toothbrush
- Show your puppy the toothbrush and let him investigate it - put some paste on it and let him lick it off
- Place the brush against his teeth and let him get used to that new feeling, let him lick the past off the brush and gently move the brush back and forth
- Brush a few teeth - choose those easiest to reach such as the canines
- End the session after doing just a couple of teeth - don't push it too far
- Gradually build up until you can brush his mouth along the outside of the teeth down the whole gumline - praise him all the time, after all this is pretty invasive

Next work up to brushing the inside of the teeth:

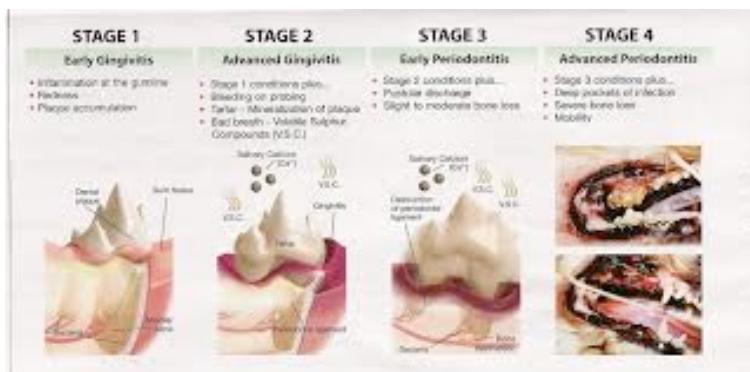
- Before you do this, make sure you can open your dog's mouth as you will need him to be comfortable with this. Practice and reward for a little opening to start with until he is happy

for you to open his mouth and pop your finger inside, applying gentle pressure to the inside of his teeth. **if your dog is a little nippy, use a brush to get him used to this so your fingers are safe**

- Once he is happy having his mouth open, brush a small area of the inside teeth surfaces. As before, move slowly and don't force your dog to accept it.

Tiny short sessions on a daily basis are best so that you eventually can quickly brush your dog's teeth every day.

*** If your dog seems really sensitive or has bleeding from his mouth, make sure you have your vet check him out. If he is particularly troublesome, seek help or ask your vet to help you **



Another great option for dental care is the Emi Pet toothbrush. This is an ultrasonic brush that effectively removes tartar and keeps your dog's mouth healthy.

You will still need to train your dog to accept the brush in his mouth, but rather than having to brush the teeth, you just hold the brush head against it and let the ultrasonic waves do their job.

Although the Emi Pet is at first glance expensive, consider it a lifelong investment for your dog; after all, the bill for anaesthetic and tooth removal could be £300+ so it does make financial sense. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbHNCwdqFLI>

Other great ways to ensure dental health are to use chew toys which can help wipe away build up and prevent tartar as well as being fabulous boredom busters. This is particularly important when your puppy is teething - giving him something he *can* chew will save your furniture and other items you don't particularly want destroyed!

So now you know how to get your puppy prepared for his future - he will be welcomed at the groomers and vets with open arms!

