

Training for Good Grooming Experiences!

(Source: 'Patcho's Grooming', Campbellton, NB, 'Pawsibilities with Dogs Inc.', NB)

Many breeds require regular grooming, and almost all dogs need a good wash in a warm bath, with quality shampoos, coat and/or skin conditioning products, a good brushing, and a nail trim on a regular basis, throughout their lives.



When is the best time to begin your puppy's or rescue dog's grooming experiences?

When your puppy or rescue dog first comes home, quiet time with you is important so your dog feels safe & begins to trust & bond with you. Then, when your new puppy, or rescue dog, has had at least their 2nd round of vaccinations, it's time to book their first visit to the groomer.

Bring your puppy with you for a 'meet & greet' when you are ready to book their appointment. Bring lots of treats, and make the initial walk into the groomer's building, positive, fun and stress-free. Let puppy explore a little, give lots of treats as he walks in and around. Let him find his way to 'meeting' the groomer on his own, without suddenly being petted or held or touched. Remember, the "5 Second Rule", as your groomer navigates 'consent'. Crouch sideways to the puppy, let him decide he wants to come close or sniff or investigate. Touch, without speaking to or making direct eye contact. Count to 5, then remove any touch. What is puppy's choice? Interact if puppy show that he wants to, and disconnect after short intervals to allow him to move away if he wants. No grooming yet! Just leave and go home.

Of course, there are some things you can do to prepare your puppy or dog for a grooming experience.

For your new puppy, your rescue dog or even if your dog is older, and has had stressful experiences in the past, you can work with your dog at home to build his confidence, resilience and cooperation around grooming.

Create a positive association with grooming. Grooming tools & techniques = treats! You can give a super tasty treat, or a frozen lick mat or tasty kong as you introduce grooming tools. Some examples:

- * introduce your puppy or dog to grooming tools early and often.
 - * bring out his brush, let him sniff, give a treat
 - * touch him with his brush, give a treat
 - * do just one brush on his body, give a treat
 - * bring out his nail clippers, let him sniff, give a treat
 - * cut a piece of pasta with his nail clipper so he can hear the sound, give a treat
 - * touch his shoulder, or along his back with the clippers, give a treat
 - * touch his paw with his nail clipper, give a treat
 - * ask for a paw, and then touch his paw with his clippers, give a treat
 - * pick up an ear, to look inside, give a treat
 - * hold an ear, and 'pretend' to clip with scissors, give a treat
 - * hold his tail, give a treat
 - * hold his tail, 'pretend' to clip with scissors, give a treat
 - * hold his muzzle for a second, give a treat. Hold for longer periods of time, give a treat
 - * hold his muzzle and 'pretend' to trim with scissors, give a treat

Note: it may be necessary to also condition your dog to wear a muzzle during groomings. Ask us how!

- * expose & desensitize to the sound of the dryer
 - * play your dog dryer (or even your hair dryer), away from him, just so he can hear the sound, give a treat.
 - * repeat the exposure to the sound, 3-4X a day, giving treats while the sound is on
 - * begin to move the dryer closer to your puppy after several days, going slow, giving treats
- * expose & desensitize to the 'air' from the dryer on their body
 - * if puppy looks relaxed & comfy, & feels safe, you can begin to 'blow' the air on the dog, in very short sessions, giving lots of treats throughout

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Then, at their 'introductory groom', most groomers will do a bath, use a dryer to dry your dog, brush your dog, do a nail trim and do a 'sanitary' trim. Rather than do a full body shave or clipping, this 'introductory groom' can ensure your dog is not overwhelmed with too many new 'sensory' experiences of sound & touch. Short experiences are best for puppy to learn that he is safe and how to cooperate with grooming techniques & tools. If you want your dog to happily accept grooming, go slow, invest in repeat 'introductory grooms' if necessary to help him build tolerance & acceptance without undue stress.

Ask for and trust your groomers feedback. Your groomer can give you information on how soon additional grooming can be added, as well as what you can do at home to improve the experience and reduce stress for your dog during grooming. You are both working to be sure your dog is not stressed, restrained or frightened during a grooming.

How often should your dog be professionally groomed?

Bring your dog to a groomer for regular baths, nail trims, and coat trims, as you feel necessary to keep his coat & skin healthy, and his nails short so that he is not walking on them!

Keep in mind that neglecting to care for your dog's coat can lead to skin irritations, extreme matting that is painful & dangerous, can lead to 'hot spots', parasitic, bacterial or fungal infections.

Overgrown nails can cause your dog to slip when his pads are not on the floor or ground, painful paws when nails put pressure on the toes, change the way your dog walks causing joint problems, and can more easily snag or break causing a painful injury.

Keep in mind, many dogs, especially those with long and/or curly coats, are prone to matting without regular grooming & care. Many breeds also have 'double coats' that can require more 'deep cleaning'. These double-coated breeds (like Shepherds, Goldens, Huskies, even Pomeranians) and curly coated breeds (like the Poodles & 'Doodles', for example) should be cared for regularly at home, and groomed professionally every 4-6 weeks.

If you want a longer coat on your curly breeds and/or are able to effectively care for those double-coats with consistent, careful grooming at home, you should bring your dog to professional groomer every 6-8 weeks.



"Uggh!
But, it had to be done!"

Neglecting to brush & comb your dog's coat correctly, can often result in having to shave the coats quite short, to eliminate painful matting. Your groomer may suggest shaving more closely if the dog is deeply matted, is uncomfortable with combing or brushing because the matts are twisted, or does not allow the groomer to work the matts out. Releasing deep, twisted matts is both painful for your dog, and time-consuming for your groomer. Don't expect your groomer to correct the problems that result from poor at-home grooming, beyond a close shave.



If your dog has to have a close shave, in order to be comfortable & healthy, you can start again to build a reliable, daily grooming routine between professional groomings, to prevent future problems.

Make early plans to both train your dog for grooming and for him to meet your groomer! You'll be working as a team to ensure your dog's coat, skin and nails are kept clean, healthy and looking fabulous!