

PUPPY BODY, FOOD BOWL & TOY HANDLING EXERCISES

Teaching a puppy to calmly accept handling is a big part of puppy training. Imagine all the ways your puppy may be handled in her life – a child may hug her, a groomer may trim her nails, a veterinarian may restrain her to examine her, someone may take her food or toy away, etc. How she reacts to all these types of handling can be influenced by how she is handled in the early weeks of her life.

Handling is also a great way to communicate with your dog. It is a great way to build calmness and trust in your dog. When your dog is comfortable with handling, touching your dog causes the release of the calming hormone, oxytocin, in your dog's body that helps calm your dog. It also can make your dog more social, and even increases her ability to learn. Appropriate conditioning to handling makes dogs less likely to bite when put in the situation of being touched unexpectedly, can act to calm your dog down, help her feel comfortable, reorient her to you and help her deal with stressful environments. Most dogs, unless previously trained, are uncomfortable with being touched under certain circumstances.

When to Start

Puppies go through a critical period of development which ends around the age of 16 weeks. Most puppies will be more accepting of things they encounter later in life if they are exposed to them during this critical learning period. This is the time to start body, food bowl and toy handling exercises.

All handling exercises should be done with people familiar to the puppy at first. Once your puppy is comfortable with each individual exercise, you can have unfamiliar people participate.

How Often

Handling exercises should be done a few times a day for a few minutes each time. It is also recommended that you join a puppy training or socialization class. These types of training classes have a strong focus on puppy socialization. Doing a puppy class once a week gives you the opportunity to introduce your puppy to being handled by other people under the supervision of an experienced dog trainer.

[Arizona Humane Society's Puppy Parties](#) provide a safe, secure and clean environment for your puppy to practice important social skills with other puppies and people. Your puppy can attend four (4) days after receiving a Da2PP and a Bordetella vaccine. Puppies five (5) months of age and over need a current Rabies vaccine. Please see the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior's [statement](#) for more information on the importance of puppy socialization.



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It is important to remember that all handling exercises must be associated with a positive experience – that way your puppy learns body, food bowl and toy handling means something good. Utilize tiny pieces of high value treats (i.e. lunch meat, hotdogs, cheese, etc.) during all training exercises. Reward your puppy with a tiny bit of treat after each repetition of any training exercise you do.

Be aware of your puppy's body language and stop a training exercise immediately if your puppy is showing signs she is uncomfortable. See the [Canine Body Language](#) tip sheet for more information on how to interpret your puppy's signals.

Body Handling Exercises

- Stroke your puppy from head to tail
- Gently pick up your puppy's paws
- Pick up and hold your puppy's paws for a few seconds
- Unfold your puppy's ears and look inside
- Rub your puppy's belly
- Gently tug your puppy's tail
- Lift your puppy's lips and look at her teeth
- Gently hug your puppy
- Gently restrain your puppy (hug your puppy and hold her still for a few seconds)
- Brush your puppy
- Pick up your puppy
- Pick up and hold your puppy in your arms!

Food Bowl Handling Exercises

Follow the below steps in order. Repeat each step twice during her meal time. Only move on to the next step when your puppy's body language indicates she is comfortable.

1. Remain near your puppy while she eats her meal out of her bowl. You can sing to or talk quietly to her, but do not touch her or the bowl.
2. Walk by your puppy while she is eating, announce yourself quietly and drop a high value treat (i.e. lunch meat, cheese, hotdogs, etc.) into the bowl and immediately walk away.
3. Approach your puppy while she is eating, announce yourself quietly, bend down, place a high value treat in the food bowl and walk away. Do not linger or leave your hand in the food bowl.
4. Approach your puppy while she is eating, announce yourself quietly, bend down and pick up the bowl. Quickly place a high value treat in the bowl and immediately put the bowl back down and walk away.



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Toy Handling Exercises

Follow the below steps in order. Only move on to the next step when your puppy's body language indicates she is comfortable.

1. Remain near your puppy while she is playing with a toy. You can sing to or talk quietly to her, but do not touch her or the toy.
2. Walk by your puppy while she is playing with a toy, announce yourself quietly and drop a high value treat (i.e. lunch meat, cheese, hotdogs, etc.) next to her and immediately walk away.
3. Approach your puppy while she is playing with a toy, announce yourself quietly, bend down, place a high value treat right next to her and walk away. Do not linger or leave your hand near her or the toy.
4. Approach your puppy while she is playing with a toy, announce yourself quietly and pick up the toy. Immediately give her a high value treat and give the toy back to her.
5. Approach your puppy while she is playing with a toy and say, "Drop It." Pick up the toy, immediately give her a high value treat and give the toy back to her.

For more information, please visit azhumane.org.

