

Handling of Program Puppies

To help prepare the program puppy for any veterinary or grooming appointments, it is very important that the puppy is comfortable and calm while being handled and physically evaluated. It is also equally important that they are a willing participant while being handled. We never want to forcefully manipulate the program puppy as that can cause an adverse reaction and the puppy's natural reflex will be to pull away from the handler.

What is Handling?

Handling is the act of physically examining the program puppy from nose to tail. The person doing the evaluation should lift the program puppy's lips to examine the teeth and gums, then move to examine the eyes and ears. They will then slowly work their way down the body and examine each of the program puppy's legs and paws, eventually working their way to the tail.

After the body examination, the handler should hold the program puppy close to the handler's body and gently apply pressure while the program puppy remains in a standing position for a few seconds then calmly release the program puppy.

Lastly, the handler will sit on the floor with their legs straight out and gently coax the program puppy to lay on their back in between the handler's legs. While in this position the handler will touch puppy's legs, paws, and stomach, then calmly release them with "Free!".

The expectation is that the program puppy remains calm and be a willing participant while being examined. It is encouraged to use both soft verbal praise and treats throughout the examination/handling session. For a younger teething program puppy, you may want to utilize a teething toy to help prevent them from mouthing you while you examine and handle them.

When Should Handling be Practiced?

Handling should be done daily at a time where the program puppy is most calm. After a play or training session, or right before the program puppy is ready for a nap is often a good time. The environment in which you are examining/handling the program puppy should be calm as well.

If you are practicing in a busy room with people constantly coming in and out, or there are also other dogs/animals in the room, it may be too distracting for a program puppy, and they may be more inclined to pull away from you to get whatever is most exciting to them.

Instead, the environment should be calm and free of distractions for a successful session. If the program puppy does try to pull or get away, gently hold them until they stop wiggling and/or pulling, mark with "Yes!", then reward and release them with "Free!". The idea is that they aren't being rewarded for pulling away by releasing them while they are pulling.