Training as Enrichment: Doggie "Spaw" Day

FEAR FREE HAPPY HOMES®
Helping pets live happy, healthy, full lives

FEAR FREE®
Taking the pet out of petrified.

By using reward-based techniques, you can create a "spaw day" for your dog right at home! From necessary procedures such as nail trims and brushing to calming "doga," you can help your dog relax at home.

1. AT-HOME "PAWDICURE"

Lessen the scare of nail care by positively familiarizing your pooch with different elements of nail care. Rather than trying to tackle a full nail trim right away, break the process down into individual elements that the dog can be introduced to a little at a time before they're eventually pieced together for a full nail trim.

NOTE: If your dog has shown extreme fear and/or aggression with nail trims before, we suggest seeking the help of a trainer or behaviorist before beginning.

Accustom the dog to:

- **The setup**
  Nonslip surface, handler stationed nearby.
- **The handling**
  Touching the paws and nails, starting first up higher on the dog's shoulder or hip and gradually gliding your touch down the legs and to the paws and nails as the dog remains calm.
- **The sound**
  Try clipping a piece of dry pasta right next to your dog's nail to simulate the sound of a nail being clipped. If using a grinder, turn the grinder on several feet away from the dog at first and gradually move closer to him as he remains calm.
- **The tools**
  Nail clippers, grinder, file, styptic powder.
- **The sensations**
  Paws being handled while nails are touched by the other hand and eventually an object (initially not the nail trim tool), the vibration of a grinding tool (without actually grinding a nail at first).
- **The actual nail care tool**
  Finally, hold the actual clippers or grinder against the nail and eventually use it on the nail.

Instead of merely exposing the dog to nail care, make it a positive experience by delivering fast flowing or continuous treats throughout the process to help build the dog's calm contentment.

Only continue nail care as the dog remains happily relaxed. Assess the dog's comfort level by continually attending to his body language and immediately stopping if the dog shows heightened stress, displays a sudden lack of interest in treats, or struggles or tries to move away.

2. BRUSHING

Combing through your dog's coat helps to detangle, smooth, and distribute healthy oils throughout the coat and offers the opportunity to check your dog's fur, skin and overall body, investigating for potential concerns like lumps, bumps, cuts, sore spots, or debris embedded in fur or skin.

- For dogs with longer or more tangle-prone coats, regular brushing or coat care is more likely to be a normal part of ongoing care in order to keep the dog's fur tangle free and underlying skin healthy. Even for short-haired, slick-coated dogs, regular brushing is beneficial.
- By using a soft rubber massaging brush that's also designed to pick up loose hair you can provide both a calming, relaxing massage for your dog and the opportunity to collect excess dead hair.
- To accustom your dog to brushing, pair each brush stroke with a high-value treat initially. You can gradually increase the number of brush strokes before delivering a treat.
- Alternatively, your dog can lick a spreadable food such as peanut butter or E-Z cheese out of a long-lasting toy or lickmat the entire time you're brushing him.
- For those dogs who are especially averse to a brush, consider grooming gloves, which both capture excess fur and provide a mini massage for your pup. Since it's more like hands "petting" the dog than the experience of actual brushing, it's better tolerated by many canines.

3. DOGA DOG STANCE

"Doga," the combination of the words "dog" and "yoga," encourages calm focus and deep breathing that leads to a more content state.

- The benefits of deep breathing extend to our dogs, including decreased heart rate, lowered blood pressure, and feelings of wellbeing. While dogs may not naturally know to slow down and deepen their breaths, they can be taught to do so by training a "doga dog stance."
- The three components of a dog doing a "doga dog stance" are:
  1. Eyes focused on their human handler (this encourages calm concentration)
  2. Ears are up and facing forward (a more alert ear position).
  3. Mouth is closed (promotes deeper breathing through the nose).
- The dog can be in any position, including "four on the floor" with the dog in a balanced, standing position. But, ideally, the dog is in a settled position like sit or a down to reinforce greater relaxation.
- While the dog may not naturally do all three elements of eye contact, forward ears, and closed mouth all at once, each component can be practiced separately and eventually pieced together until they form a complete behavior.