



# When Vet Visits and Grooming are Traumatic

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Most of us grew up taking for granted that certain grooming or medical procedures were inherently semi-torturous events for our companion pets. We carried out the necessary procedures as quickly and as painlessly as possible, but we always assumed that physical restraint, loud protest, frantic attempts to escape and, in some cases, defensive aggression were simply par for the course.

Vets and groomers are all-too familiar with this scenario, along with thousands of pet owners who dread trips to the vet's office or groomer's salon or even worse, go for years without a visit to either because the prospect is too dangerous to staff or too painful for the owner to stomach.

Today, there is growing recognition that violent restraint, defensive bites, painful protest and emotional anguish are no longer a necessary part of grooming or veterinary care. Your dog can learn to like—and even voluntarily participate in—husbandry procedures. There are three main principles to remember.

## Consent

Never do anything to him that he's not happy about. Once you start training your dog to love ear drops, for example, he must not receive ear drops outside of the training context. During training proceed at his pace, and only when he opts in to the procedure. Let him vote with his feet and walk away if he wants. This is tricky for us, because it flies in the face of our impatience to get the job done. But the patience you show now will pay off in large dividends—a dog who is happy to have his ears handled and medicated for the rest of his life. You're playing the long game.

## Keep it Fun and Safe

Use really yummy food rewards and keep it lighthearted. Approach it as if you're just teaching him a new trick because, actually, you are.

If your pet has a human bite history, help him and the humans around him stay safe. Even though you will change his feelings about certain procedures, there is no guarantee in behavior. Teach him to learn to love a muzzle and give everyone peace of mind. For more information about this fun and easy process, see [muzzleupproject.com](http://muzzleupproject.com).

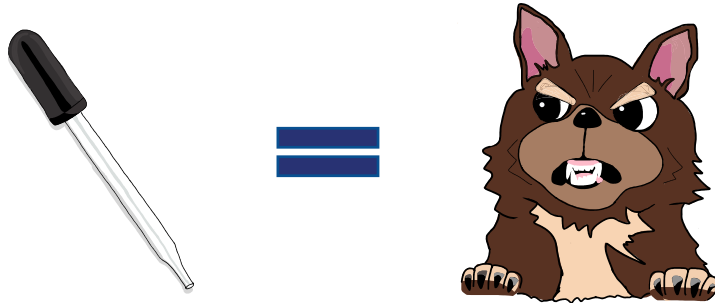
## Train Slowly

Think through the procedure and break it down into very small steps. Separate any instruments or medicines from the body touching, and train them independently. Writing down a list of incremental steps will help you resist the temptation to go too quickly. The tortoise wins this race every time. For instance, if you want your dog to love eardrops, your list may look like this:

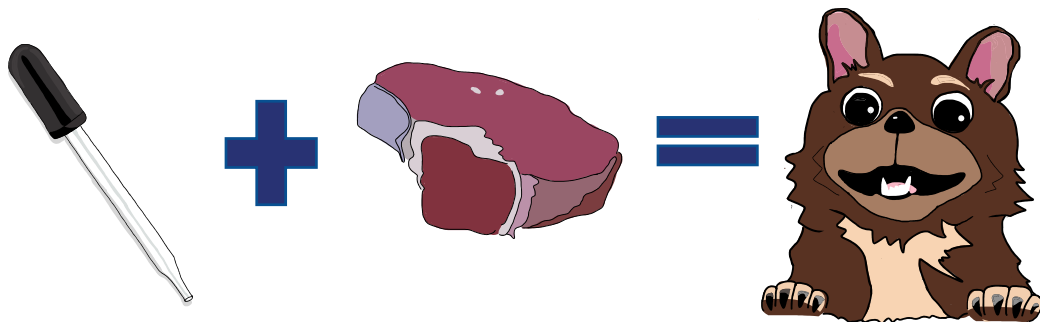
1. Touch ear lightly (no bottle)
2. Rub the tip of the ear (no bottle)
3. Lift ear and look inside (no bottle)
4. Massage ear gently (no bottle)
5. Show dog the bottle at 3-foot distance
6. Show the bottle at 1-foot distance
7. Touch the ear with the bottle
8. Touch inside of ear with bottle
9. Put bottle slightly into ear cavity
10. Squeeze drop into ear
11. Massage drop into ear

Once your list is ready, start with step 1 and if your dog does not pull or walk away, reward him with yummy food and praise. If he does pull or walk away, say nothing and back up a step. Once you can do a step 5 times in a row with your dog happily participating, move on to the next step and not before. This sounds excruciatingly slow, but it goes faster than you think and remember—you're buying your dog freedom from eardrop torment for the rest of his life.

### Before



### After



If your dog has had negative experiences with your procedure, do what you can to start fresh. If he hates nail clipping, consider switching to a Dremel or nail file. If he hates having his tail brushed, buy a new brush. Work in a new location. If you've always stood over him, have him stand next to you. Most importantly, protect your new procedure from becoming the next thing he hates by always keeping it safe, painless, and something he can opt out of at any time.

## Husbandry Project

For nationally-vetted, user-friendly training plans on helping dogs to be happy and relaxed with veterinary staff and offices as well as many common veterinary procedures, contact the Academy for Dog Trainers' Husbandry Project at [info@academyfordogtrainers.com](mailto:info@academyfordogtrainers.com).

The Academy FOR DOG TRAINERS

[www.academyfordogtrainers.com](http://www.academyfordogtrainers.com)