

What does sensitivity to body handling mean?

It means that your dog is uncomfortable when certain parts of his body are approached and/or handled. Your dog may pull back, appear tense, show whites of the eyes or lip lick when you touch some areas. He may become mouthy or even bite. Common areas for dogs to be fearful of touch are the ears, tail and paws.

What should I do?

- **Stop touching the sensitive area immediately.** Simply touching the area over and over will not desensitize the dog to it, and actually, it has the potential to reinforce their fear.
- **Bring the dog back to a comfortable and relaxed state.** Do something the dog enjoys, such as playing with toys, doing basic training skills, or touching and petting an area he is very comfortable with – the chest is usually a good place to touch.
- **Assess at which point your dog becomes uncomfortable with touch.** Is it when your hand approaches his ears? Is it when your fingertips brush his paws? Do not move beyond the point where he appears uncomfortable. Being aware of your dog's preferences is critical to working towards making them more comfortable with touch.

How can I train my dog to accept body handling?

- **This stepwise procedure can be applied to many areas.** We will use the example of paw sensitivity:
 - Step 1. Slowly reach towards a paw. Treat. Repeat.
 - Step 2. Touch a paw. Treat. Repeat.
 - Step 3. Briefly hold or cup the paw. Treat. Repeat.
 - Step 4. Hold the paw for three seconds. Treat. Repeat.
 - Step 5. Hold the paw and gently press as you would for nail trimming. Treat. Repeat.
 - Step 6. Hold the paw and gently probe between the toes. Treat. Repeat.
- **Start slow.** Do several short sessions each day.
- **Repeat each step several times.** You may spend several days or even weeks/months on a single step before your dog is comfortable enough for you to move on. In cases of sensitivity to body handling, you are more likely to be successful when you go slowly.
- **Only move on to the next step when your dog is comfortable with the previous step.** Look for a relaxed body, enthusiastic tail wags, no mouthing of your hand, and your dog not trying to avoid your hand but instead eagerly awaiting a treat before you move on to the next step.
- **If your dog is uncomfortable, go back to an earlier step.** We all have good days and bad days. Sometimes, your dog may not be as comfortable with the handling as he was last time – that's okay, just go back to a point where he is comfortable (relaxed body, happy tail wags, etc.) and keep practicing.
- **If your dog is struggling with a new step, create an intermediate step.** Using the example above, some dogs may not be comfortable jumping from a brief hold (step 3) to a 3 second hold (step 4). In that case, you would want to insert an intermediate step, where you hold his paw for 1.5 seconds, or 2 seconds.
- **Hire a professional.** A Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (<http://certifiedanimalbehaviorist.com/>) or qualified Certified Professional Dog Trainer (<http://www.ccpdt.org/>) can help you improve or eliminate your dog's anxiety over body handling.