

GENTLING- TOUCH IS GOOD!Client Information Series

What is gentling?

Gentling is a technique used to teach dogs and cats that human hands are a good thing through the use of body massage, range of motion, and restraint in a positive manner. It promotes handling trust, encourages the animal to enjoy being handled, prevents aggression and fearful behaviors, and develops a relaxed friendly outgoing personality. This technique is best applied to young animals. Older animals may require a slower approach. Gentling also aids in the veterinarian's physical exam and basic care procedures such as nail trims, ear cleanings, tooth brushing, and bathing. The animal's veterinary visits will be much more positive and fun!

3 steps of gentling:

1. Body massage
2. Range of motion
3. Positive restraint

Step 1: Body Massage

Pick a time when the animal is relaxed and/or sleeping. Begin by petting the animal in an area where the animal really enjoys it. Next gently rub the animal's back and chest, sliding the skin back and forth over the body. Praise the animal and offer treats to create a positive experience. At each session, increase the amount of areas you massage. For example, if the animal really enjoys the "good back rub" at the next session you may gently rub the animal's head, feet, under the chin and/or ears, rear end, or the belly. If at any time the animal is resistant to the massage stop, let the animal relax, and try again later. The goal is to desensitize the animal to the human touch. Step 1 is complete when you are able to massage your animal's entire body and the animal *enjoys* it!

Step 2: Range of Motion

When the animal has accepted massages readily, range of motion is the next step of gentling. Range of motion is not only used in the gentling technique, but also surgical exercises. The goal of range of motion is to move every part of the animal's body gently slightly against the resistance of the animal. Range of motion is done by moving or manipulating each extremity of the animal as far as possible with the animal's normal ambulation. Over time, the animal should readily accept manipulation of all extremities without discomfort. Range of motion exercises may seem unnatural however; they are best learned at a young age.

Step 3: Positive Restraint

The goal of positive restraint is to make holding the animal fun and enjoyable, not stressful. This step may take more time to develop than the previous steps and it is

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important to go slow. Holding the animal still slightly against their will may seem simple; however, animals are more likely to reject this restraint. The use of food treats and during the restraint process will help reassure the animal that there is nothing wrong. When the animal accepts any restraint praise them! As soon as the animal relaxes, let the animal up, praise and give them a treat. This shows that you are not attempting to cause harm.

Tips

- Signs of stress in the animal:
 - Tense, increased muscle tone
 - Struggles, moves away
 - Acts frightened or aggressive
 - Mouths your hand
 - Vocalizes
- Less is better
 - Do exercises daily adding more time as the animal shows acceptance
 - Couple each exercise with treats and praise
- Some stress is okay
 - A little stress can be considered a positive
 - The goal of gentling is for the animal to learn how to tolerate small doses of stress without acting fearful or aggressive

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