

# Cooperative Care: When to Touch and Poke?

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What is  
cooperative  
care?

Teaching pets behaviors that willingly allow them to participate in their own husbandry and veterinary care!




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## How dog's learn!

**Positive reinforcement** – Addition of a pleasurable stimulus to increase the likelihood an animal will perform the behavior again.

**Marker training** – A form of training where the correct behavior is marked with a bridging stimulus (clicker, verbal) and then reinforced.



**Desensitization** – The decrease of an emotional response to a stimulus after gradual exposure.

**Classical counterconditioning** – Changing the emotional or physiological response of an animal

**Operant conditioning** – A method of learning through trial and error that creates associations between behavior and consequences.

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## Consent behaviors

**Consent:** Giving permission for something to happen. In animal training, it is a behavior that has been taught to let the trainer/owner/veterinary staff know that the pet is ready for touch or to perform a procedure.  
(*Cooperative veterinary care, Howell and Feyereide*)

**Targeting:** Process of teaching your dog to touch an object, the target, with a part of their body, most often their nose

**Stationing:** The dog targets a specific spot with their body for a duration of time

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## What is a chin rest?

The dog rests their chin/head on an area or object for a given amount of time to permit handling and procedures.




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## What you'll need

Platform for target item – chair, stool, etc. (Ideally at a height for easy chin placement while standing)

Target item for the chin rest – towel, pillow, blanket

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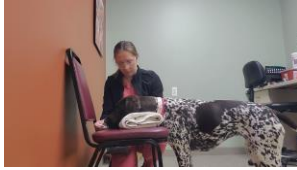
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## Getting started

With the dog in a standing position use a lure to encourage them to move their nose/chin over the target item.

Say "yes" or click to mark the behavior and follow with a treat.

If the animal moves into a sit or down, use a food lure or toss a treat away to reset the dog back into a standing position.




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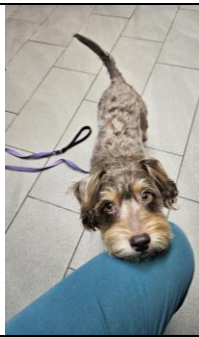
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## Shaping the behavior

Continue to shape toward the dog resting their chin on the item by either marking downward movement of the head or using a food lure to encourage the dog to rest their chin on top of the target.




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## Fade the lure

Start by shaping your hand as if you are holding a treat (but with none inside) to lure into position and feeding treats with the other hand.

Eventually the goal is to move your hands out view, continuing to reinforce for offering the chin resting on the target.




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## Duration

Once offering the chin rest with as little prompting as possible, begin to increase duration by mixing in slightly longer durations with short durations.




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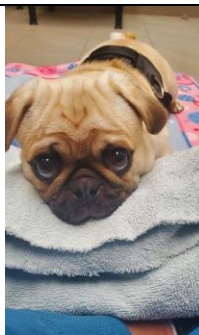
## Getting consent

Once the dog is reliably offering the chin rest behavior begin to teach them they are in control of the interaction by using the chin rest for consent.

Before touching add in hand movement first!

Start with raising your hand in view, then click/mark and treat.

Continue to move your hand toward the patient a few inches at a time.




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## Opting out

When the dog opts out it is a good opportunity to teach the dog no reinforcement is given for lifting head and/or moving away.

If the dog chooses to lift his head, pause and reflect on what occurred just beforehand. Did you reach toward them? Was there a noise or movement inside or outside the room? Have you been training for a while and the dog is mentally tired?

Use what you learn to set the patient up for success going forward.

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## When to move onto next step?

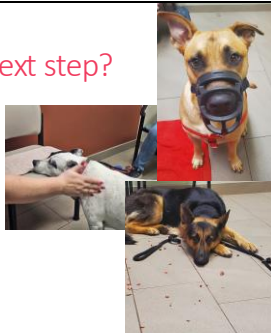
Consider the dog's previous history.

- o What is their response when fearful? Bite history? Resilience?

Watch the dog's body language closely!!

- o Panting, ears back, tail tucked, averting gaze, suspicious/watchful, fidgeting, taking treats roughly or not taking them at all

Is the dog able to perform known cues?




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## Ready for the next step!

- o Relaxed body
- o Keeping body stationary/no avoidance behaviors (i.e. not shifting away)
- o Offering chin rest with enthusiasm after resetting by tossing a treat
- o Orientation of chin rest/proximity to me

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## Add touching

Once the dog is doing well with your hand moving, begin nonthreatening touches. Start with touching at the shoulder.




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## Predictor cue

Add in a cue to tell the patient what you are doing to do.

The ones I use frequently are - "shoulder," "pinch," and "poke."

I will also add cues for other sensitive areas I may touch or start my touching - "ear" or "hip"

The process will look like:

- o Say "shoulder"
- o Touch shoulder
- o Mark while touching shoulder
- o Stop touching shoulder and give a treat

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## When to slow down!

If the dog opts out multiple times in a row  
It is difficult to get them to reengage  
You notice an increase in anxiety or avoidance  
Moving forward split the criteria down into  
smaller more achievable steps.  
You can also help create behavioral momentum by  
mixing known cues intermittently during training  
sessions.

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## Next steps

Gradually lengthen the duration of touching, and glide your hand to other parts of the body before marking and treating.

When comfortable with one hand, add a second hand. Touching with each hand individually and then touch with both hands.




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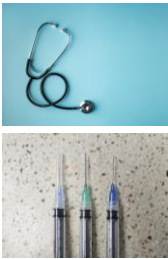
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## Add in new tools

Allow the dog time to get used to the new item.  
Practice chin rest with the item in view and then your other hand while touching before starting to move the item toward the patient.

Having the dog target the item for a mark/treat can help make it less scary!

Blunt tip needles are a good way to desensitize the dog to a slight pinch at the injection site.

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### SQ Injection

Add in a pinch/tent of the skin

When pinch/tent is going well, introduce the syringe.

Once the dog is comfortable with the syringe in your hand begin approximations of moving the syringe toward the dog, a pretend poke with the capped needle and then pretend pokes with blunt tip needles.

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The difference the day makes!




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## A German Shepherd dog is standing on a light-colored tiled floor, looking towards the camera with its mouth open. To its right is a small chalkboard sign on a wooden stand. The sign has the text "I Was A Great Parent" at the top, followed by "I love", "I teach", and "My dog". At the bottom of the sign, it says "Union Lake" and features two small drawings of pumpkins.

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