



Coach Karli

Behavioral Rehab Specialist

2-Week At Home Grooming Desensitization Program

Empower yourself and your dog with a stress-free grooming routine. This program is designed to build confidence, cooperation, and comfort, transforming grooming from a chore into a positive bonding experience for both of you.

Your Path to Grooming Success



Congratulations on committing to this structured desensitization program! Over the next two weeks, you'll witness a remarkable transformation in your dog's attitude toward grooming. What begins as careful, methodical training will evolve into a calm, predictable routine that both you and your dog can feel confident about.

Remember that every dog is unique. Some will progress through these steps exactly as outlined, while others may need extra time at certain stages. Honor your dog's individual pace, celebrate every small victory, and maintain patience throughout the process. The investment you're making now, in time, consistency, and positive experiences—will pay dividends for years to come.

The skills your dog learns during these two weeks extend far beyond grooming. You're teaching emotional regulation, impulse control, trust, and cooperation, and foundational behaviors that will benefit every aspect of your relationship. You're proving to your dog that new experiences can be positive, that patience is rewarded, and that you're a reliable, trustworthy guide through uncertain situations.

2

Weeks to Transform

A complete behavior change in just 14 days of consistent practice

5

Sessions Daily

Brief, positive interactions that build confidence without overwhelming

30

Seconds Per Session

Short duration ensures every interaction ends on a positive note

As you embark on this journey, trust the process, stay consistent, and maintain your calm, encouraging energy. Your dog is capable of learning these skills, and you're capable of teaching them. By following this program with patience and dedication, you'll create a grooming experience that's stress-free, efficient, and even enjoyable for both of you. Here's to confident, cooperative grooming sessions and the stronger bond you'll build along the way!

Learning At Their Own Pace

Building confident, positive grooming behavior takes patience, consistency, and a structured approach. This comprehensive 2-week training program uses proven desensitization techniques to transform grooming time from a stressful ordeal into a calm, predictable routine. Whether you're a devoted dog owner, trainer, or a professional groomer helping a family with a stressed pup, this step-by-step schedule provides everything you need to create lasting positive associations with grooming.

The key to success lies in understanding that every dog learns at their own pace. This program is designed around micro-sessions—brief, positive interactions that last just 10-30 seconds but are repeated 3-5 times daily. This frequency creates muscle memory and emotional comfort without overwhelming your dog. By breaking down the grooming process into small, manageable steps and pairing each one with high-value rewards, you'll help your dog discover that grooming time means good things happen.



Understanding the Training Philosophy

Why Desensitization Works

Desensitization is a scientifically proven method that gradually exposes your dog to grooming stimuli in a controlled, positive way. Instead of forcing your dog to endure a full grooming session, this approach builds confidence one tiny step at a time. Each successful micro-session creates a positive memory, and over time, these memories compound into genuine comfort and cooperation.

The magic happens through repetition and reward. When your dog experiences the grooming table, noose, and brush alongside something they love—delicious treats—their brain begins to form new, positive associations. What once triggered anxiety now predicts something wonderful.

The Power of Micro-Sessions

Micro-sessions are brief training interactions lasting just 10–30 seconds. This short duration is intentional and powerful. By keeping sessions extremely brief, you stop before your dog reaches their stress threshold. This means every single session ends on a positive note, building confidence rather than depleting it.

Repeating these sessions 3–5 times daily creates rapid progress without overwhelming your dog. Think of it like compound interest for behavior—small deposits of positive experience, made frequently, yield remarkable results over just two weeks.

Essential Equipment and Setup

Grooming Table (36-42 inches)

A stable, non-slip grooming table provides the foundation for all training. The elevated surface creates a designated grooming space that helps your dog understand when grooming time begins. Choose a table with a textured, non-slip surface to ensure your dog feels secure and stable throughout the session. Place a towel on the table if extra grip is needed.

Grooming Arm with Secure Noose

The grooming arm and noose aren't about restraint—they're about gentle support and predictability. A properly fitted noose provides just enough guidance to help your dog remain still while allowing them to move their head comfortably. Never use this as a punishment tool; it should feel like a gentle guide, not a restriction. Keep your hands on the dog at all times so they do not jump off the table.

Soft Slicker or Pin Brush

Start with the gentlest brush possible—a soft slicker or pin brush with rounded tips. The goal during desensitization is to introduce the sensation of brushing without causing any discomfort. You can graduate to more specialized grooming tools once your dog is completely comfortable with the basic process.

High-Value Treats (Grooming-Only)

Reserve your dog's absolute favorite treats exclusively for grooming sessions. Think tiny pieces of unseasoned chicken, turkey, beef, or cheese—each piece about the size of a pencil eraser. These treats should be so irresistible that your dog eagerly anticipates grooming time. The exclusivity of these rewards makes grooming sessions extra special.

Creating the Perfect Training Environment

Your training environment plays a crucial role in your dog's success. Dogs are incredibly sensitive to their surroundings, and even subtle environmental stressors can undermine your training efforts. By carefully controlling the training space, you eliminate unnecessary distractions and create a calm, predictable atmosphere where your dog can focus entirely on learning.



Corner Placement Strategy

Position the grooming table in a room corner with walls on the back and one side. This strategic placement creates a sense of security and reduces your dog's options for escape or distraction. The walls act as visual and physical boundaries that help your dog feel contained in a supportive way, not a trapped way.



Minimize Noise and Traffic

Choose a room with minimal foot traffic and ambient noise. Close doors to reduce household sounds, turn off televisions and radios, and ask family members to avoid the training area during sessions. This quiet environment helps your dog stay focused and calm.



Optimize Lighting

Soft, even lighting creates a relaxed atmosphere without harsh shadows that might startle your dog. Avoid placing the table directly under bright overhead lights or ceiling fans, which can create movement and visual stimulation that distracts or concerns your dog.



Control Visual Stimulation

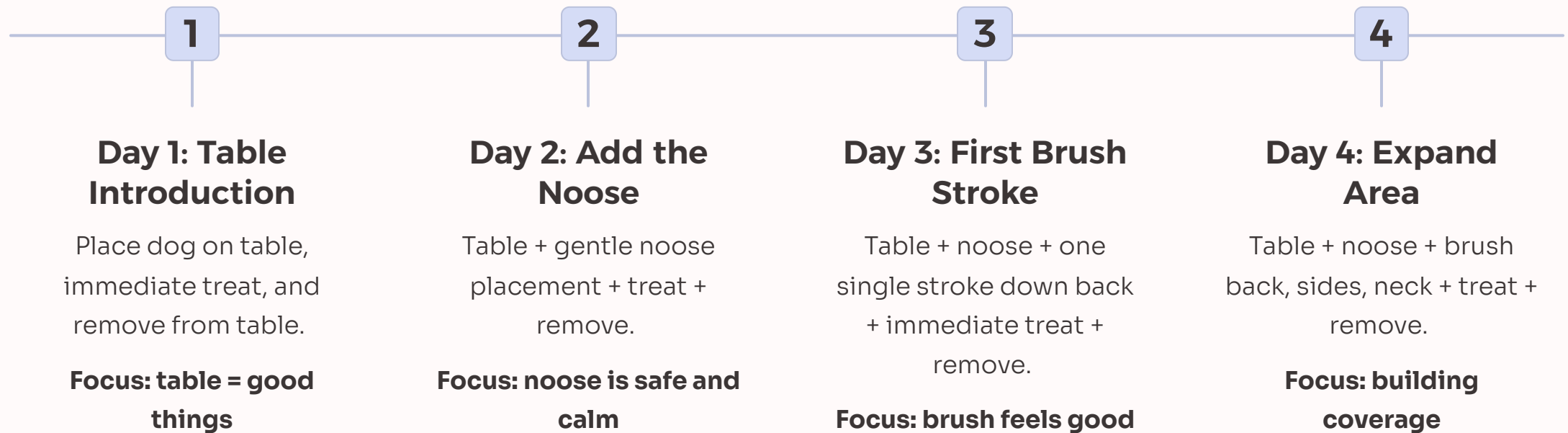
Keep the grooming table away from windows where your dog might see passing people, animals, or vehicles. These external stimuli trigger natural alertness and can make it nearly impossible for your dog to remain calm and focused on the training process.

Maintain this exact environment setup for the entire two-week period. Consistency in location and atmosphere helps your dog develop strong, positive associations with this specific space. After successful completion of the training program, you can gradually introduce the skills to other locations if needed.

Week 1 Overview: Building the Foundation

The first week focuses on creating positive associations with the grooming table, noose, and brush through gradual exposure. Each day builds upon the previous day's success, adding one new element at a time. This careful progression ensures your dog never feels overwhelmed and always ends each session feeling successful and rewarded.

During Week 1, you'll move through Steps 1-4, progressing from simply placing your dog on the table to brushing their back, sides, and neck. The pace may feel slow, but this deliberate approach creates the solid foundation necessary for long-term success. Remember, it's not about rushing to a fully groomed dog—it's about building a dog who genuinely feels comfortable and confident during grooming.



Each step in Week 1 should be repeated 3-5 times daily. These frequent, brief sessions create rapid learning without fatigue. Your dog will begin to anticipate grooming time with excitement rather than dread. Watch for signs of growing confidence: relaxed body language, tail wags, and eager movement toward the grooming table. These signals tell you your dog is successfully forming positive associations.

Week 1 Training Steps: Detailed Instructions

01

Step 1: Table + Treat (Day 1)

Gently lift and place your dog on the table. Keep your hands on the dog at all times so they do not attempt to jump off the table. Immediately give a high-value treat. Take them off the table. That's it! Repeat 3-5 times throughout the day. The entire interaction lasts just 10 seconds, but it teaches your dog that the table surface predicts rewards.

03

Step 3: Add One Brush Stroke (Day 3)

Place on table, head in noose. Now add one single, smooth brush stroke down the back from shoulders to tail. Immediately treat. Remove from noose and table. This introduces the sensation of brushing in the smallest possible increment.

02

Step 2: Table + Noose + Treat (Day 2)

Place your dog on the table. Gently place their head through the noose—it should be snug but not tight, allowing them to move their head comfortably. Keep your hands on the dog at all times so they do not attempt to jump off the table. Give the treat immediately. Remove the noose, then take them off the table. Repeat 3-5 times daily.

04

Step 4: Expand to Back, Sides, Neck (Day 4)

Place on table, head in noose. Brush down the back, both sides, and neck with smooth, gentle strokes. Treat immediately after the last stroke. Remove from noose and table. You're now covering multiple body areas while maintaining the same positive association.

Week 2 Overview: Expanding Coverage

Week 2 builds upon the solid foundation established in Week 1. By now, your dog should show clear signs of comfort with the table, noose, and brushing routine. This week focuses on gradually expanding the brushed areas to include legs, face, belly, feet, and other sensitive zones. The progression continues to be methodical—adding one new body area at a time while maintaining the same positive reward structure.

During Steps 5-8, you'll notice that sessions naturally extend slightly in duration as you cover more body areas, but each individual session should still be brief and end before your dog shows any signs of stress or fatigue. The goal is to continue building confidence by ensuring every session ends on a positive, successful note. By the end of Week 2, your dog will tolerate a complete, full-body grooming session with calm cooperation.

Day 5: Add Legs

Back, sides, neck, and now all four legs

Day 6: Add Face

Previous areas plus gentle face brushing

Day 7: Add Butt & Belly

Expanding to sensitive areas with care

Day 8+: Complete Body

Full grooming routine including feet



Remember that these timelines are guidelines. Some dogs will progress faster, while others may need an extra day or two at certain steps. Pay attention to your dog's body language and stress signals. If your dog shows hesitation or stress at any step, simply repeat that step for an additional day before moving forward. There's no prize for speed—the goal is building genuine, lasting comfort with grooming.

Week 2 Training Steps: Complete Progression

Step 5: Add Legs (Day 5)

Table + noose. Brush: back, sides, neck, then all four legs (not the feet). Treat immediately. Remove and praise. Legs can be sensitive, so use gentle pressure and watch for any signs of discomfort.

Step 6: Add Face (Day 6)

Table + noose. Brush: back, sides, neck, legs, and now the face. Use extremely gentle strokes around the muzzle, eyes, and ears. Many dogs find face grooming uncomfortable initially—go slowly and reward generously.

Step 7: Add Butt & Belly (Day 7)

Table + noose. Brush: back, sides, neck, legs, face, butt area, and belly. These areas can be particularly sensitive. For the belly, you may need to gently lift or reposition your dog. Move slowly and maintain a calm, confident energy.

Step 8: Full Body Including Feet (Day 8+)

Table + noose. Complete full-body grooming in order: back, sides, neck, legs, face, butt, belly, and finally feet. Feet are often the most challenging area. Handle each paw gently. Treat generously and end with enthusiastic praise. If he fights you for the feet reach out to your trainer, breeder, or rescue for more advice as you may need to be a little sterner at this stage. This is completely dog dependent.

By Day 8, your dog should be able to tolerate a complete grooming session covering every body area. Continue practicing this full routine daily for the remainder of Week 2 and beyond to maintain the skills. Consistency is key to preventing regression and ensuring these positive behaviors become permanent habits.

Essential Tips for Long-Term Success

Balance Rewards with Clear Boundaries

While positive reinforcement is the foundation of this program, occasionally you'll need to provide firm, clear corrections for bratty or defiant behavior. If your dog acts out, hold them gently but firmly by the beard or collar, give a clear "NO," and wait for them to stop the unwanted behavior. The instant they comply, immediately switch to praise with an enthusiastic "YES," give a treat, and let them down from the table. Reset and try again in a few minutes. This teaches that calm cooperation earns rewards, while resistance leads nowhere.

Keep Every Session Short

Here's the golden rule: always end on a high note. Stop each session while your dog is still happy, engaged, and eager for more. This approach is crucial because grooming isn't a one-time event. Your dog will need grooming throughout their entire life, so building a rock-solid foundation now pays dividends forever. If you push sessions too long and your dog becomes tired, stressed, or resistant, you'll erode all those positive associations you've worked so hard to create. The best training sessions end with your dog thinking, 'That was fun! When can we do it again?' not 'Thank goodness that's over.'

Reward Generously and Consistently

Never skimp on treats during training. Each successful step or behavior should be immediately followed by a high-value reward. The timing matters—deliver the treat within one second of the desired behavior so your dog makes the clear connection. Consistency in rewarding creates predictability, and predictability creates confidence.

Never Force Past Fear

If your dog shows genuine fear or anxiety at any step, do not push forward. Signs of fear include trembling, panting, whale eye (showing the whites of their eyes), tucked tail, or attempts to escape. When you see these signals, immediately stop, go back to the previous step, and spend more time building confidence there. Forcing a fearful dog through the process will create lasting negative associations that are much harder to overcome.

Slow, Predictable Movements

Move deliberately and avoid sudden gestures that might startle your dog



End with Happiness

Every session should conclude with a confident, happy dog—never a stressed one



Maintain Consistency

Practice daily even after completing the program to preserve skills