WOODY'S

cutting the stress out of grooming

PREPARE TO CARE

Your introduction to home grooming

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Feeling guilty or frustrated with your dogs fear of being groomed?

You're not alone.

Most dogs find grooming difficult, and most guardians feel unsure about how to help.

This guide answers the questions I hear most often when dogs struggle with handling, brushing, or visiting the groomer.

My goal isn't to "fix" your dog — it's to help you understand them. When we learn to listen, we can build trust, reduce fear, and turn grooming into something calm and cooperative.

— Daniella, Woody's Holistic Grooming

Why does my dog hate being brushed?

The skin is the largest organ on a dogs body.

The epidermis of a dogs skin is only 3-5 cells thick, in comparison to humans which is 10-15 cells thick. This is why it's so important to choose the right brush.

Here are my must haves...

A paddle brush - For brushing large areas

A rubber styling brush - For working on tougher matts

The comb - for checking your work. I always use a comb after brushing to make sure I've removed all knots and matting. The space required between the teeth of the comb will depend on the thickness and type of hair your dog has. You can also use this as a guide tool when cutting out knots!

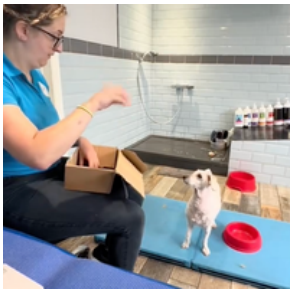
A bristle brush - to be used in the bath whilst the fur is wet and more elastic

How to introduce a brush

It’ s important to take your time introducing new equipment. Here is one of the games I like to use in my salon when introducing equipment...

What’s in the box...

1. **Put your chosen brush and two other random items such as a pen and elastic band into a box**



2. **Show each item individually to your dog, but when you pull out the brush, immediately throw them a treat**

3. **Repeat the process over short sessions several times a day**

The aim of the game is to create a positive association with the equipment before actually using it.

How do I get my dog to stay still for grooming?

In order for your dog to stay still during grooming sessions, they need to feel safe. Safety comes not from control, but from having the ability to walk away if needed. This is why the first game I teach any dog for grooming is the matt protocol

Matt protocol

1. **Lay out a matt in your chosen grooming space. Each time your dog sits with you or stands on the matt give them a reward.**

2. **Throw a treat away and then wait to see if they return. Do not call them. When they come back, give them three treats in a row**

3. **When your dog consistently comes to the matt, you can introduce movement. Reach your hand towards them without touching and then immediately give a treat. If they show signs of stress, pull back or appear uncomfortable throw the treat away from the matt and start again**

4. **Once your dog is comfortable with your hand touching them whilst on the matt, you can progress to introducing equipment, following the same steps as you did with your hand**

The most important part of this game is that it is your dogs choice. You must not call them to the matt or force them to stay on it. The more chances you give them to opt o

He won’t let me touch his paws

A dogs paws are one of the most sensitive parts of their body and so it’s easy to see why so many struggle with them being handled. Another great game to use is naming the body parts.

Naming the body parts

1 Encourage your dog to stand or lay on their matt and then decide on a number for each leg,for example:

- **1 – Front left leg**
- **2 – Front right leg**
- **3 – Back left leg**
- **4 – Back right leg**

2 Say, “One,” then calmly reach toward the front left leg — but don’t touch yet. If your dog remains calm, mark and reward. Repeat this for each leg.

3 Once your dog understands the pattern, start introducing gentle touch after each number. If your dog moves away, pause, wait for them to return, and reduce intensity next time.

4 When your dog is ready, progress to lifting the leg for a second as you say the number — then reward. Keep it brief and smooth, always ending before they feel uncomfortable. Over time, you can extend duration slightly or add other handling (brushing, nail touches, etc.).

Predictability builds trust. This simple pattern helps your dog feel they understand what’s coming — transforming handling from something done to them into something done with them.

She’s a nightmare when it comes to ears!

Ears are another big trigger for many dogs, especially those with long ears who are prone to infections. The best tip I can give for ears is to teach a chin rest.

Chin rest

1. **Start with a cushion on your lap. Place a treat onto the cushion at a distance to lure your dog into lowering their head onto it. As soon as their head touches the cushion reward them with the treat**

2. **Gradually increase the duration they have to hold their head onto the cushion before giving the reward**

3. **Once your dog is confident in keeping their head on the cushion you can start to introduce movement. Start by holding your hand out towards their ear and then rewarding for calmness. Repeat this several times.**

4. **Once they are comfortable with movement, you can start to lift the ear and look inside. Remember, if they lift their head up from the cushion stop immediately and wait for them to get back into position - give a treat and start again.**

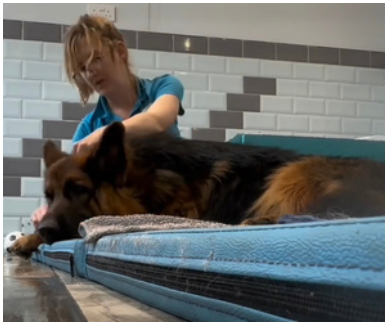
Just like the name game, the predictability helps them to feel more in control of the situation and therefore increases their trust in you.

Surely it’s easier to just get on with it?

I get it, you’re worried your dog will get matted or their nails will start curling round. You don’t want to be accused of neglecting your dog.

Whilst it may seem like pushing through is the right thing to do for your dogs welfare, we have to remember that welfare is more than just physical. It’s the mental aspect too.

When a dog struggles during grooming or handling, as humans our instinct is to hold on tighter or add more restraints. But from the dog’s perspective, we’re taking away their ability to run from something they’re afraid of. This increases the stress levels and only confirms to the dog that grooming is scary and not something safe to participate in. The more times the dog repeats this behaviour, the deeper the fear becomes and the harder it is to undo.



True calm comes from choice, not control.

Imagine you’ve gone to the dentist and you’re afraid. The dentist tells you to make a fist if you want him to stop and so after a minute you try it to see what happens. The dentist immediately stops what they’re doing, gives you a second or so to breath and then waits for you to say it’s fine to continue. You immediately feel more relaxed and your trust in the dentist increases. This is the same for our dogs - the more opportunities we give for them to say no, the less times they do.

Cooperative care is about emotional safety for both of you. Trust replaces tension. When the struggle stops, learning can begin.

Is my dog anxious or in pain?

In my experience, majority of the dogs who present with grooming difficulties are in some form of discomfort. For puppies this could be due to teething or growing pains. It could be due to ear infections, overgrown claws or dental issues. Some dogs may be suffering with gut issues, arthritis or other muscular skeletal problems all of which will have a significant impact on their handling capabilities.

Watch the way your dog moves,
does anything look off to you?
How often do they go to the toilet?
What is the consistency like?
Are there any coat changes, or areas where their fur feels or looks different?

Don't forget that dogs are the masters of hiding pain. This is why it's so important to learn the early warning signs before it becomes a bigger problem.

If you suspect your dog is in pain, or is suffering from ill health consult your vet before starting any form of training or grooming

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With the right support, guidance and trust you can turn grooming nightmares into co-operative care dreams. Take your time, listen to your dog and if you get stuck, reach out for help.

If you want to learn more or are interested in starting your journey into consent based grooming get in contact today.

📍 Learn more: www.woodysholisticgrooming.co.uk
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Because grooming should be built on trust — not tools.