Small Dog Handling: Helping Little Dogs Feel Safe

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Why are small dogs so snappy?

• We pick them up because we CAN
• They are telling us how they feel but we are not “listening”
• They have no choice
Possible Problems with Picking Up Dogs

• Bending over the dog – mildly intimidating at best, extremely frightening at worse.

• Dog is trapped – with all 4 feet off the ground, the dog can’t get away and, without the option of “flight,” may need to turn to “fight.”
Assess the dog’s comfort level

• Is the dog enjoying the interaction currently?
• Read body language – what is the dog telling us?
  ➢ Body/ears backwards
  ➢ Tongue flicks
  ➢ Yawning
  ➢ Paw lift
  ➢ Stiffening
  ➢ Changing her mind
How can we interact differently and what about dogs that like to be held?

• Consent Tests – “Pat, Pet, Pause”
• Get low (but not hovering over!)
• Let dog initiate the interaction
• Give the dog CHOICE
• Teach the dog “up”, “lap”, ”hugs” (wait for paws up)
Teaching “up” or “lap”

1. Sit on ground and wait for dog to place paws on you or jump into your lap. Give him a treat when he does.

2. If needed, coax him to your lap with a treat placed on your lap but do not touch him if he takes the treat. Toss a treat away from your body and see if the dog resets. *Careful: Using a treat as a lure may set the dog up for conflict.*

3. At this point, dog may be easily jumping in/out of lap for the treat but this is NOT an invitation to touch or handle the dog.

4. Look for a wiggly, relaxed body or him nudging you for pets before you touch him.
Teaching “up” or “lap”

5. Once dog is happily jumping into your lap, play a game of UP and OFF

6. Cue “UP” right before he jumps up and treat him in your lap

7. Toss a treat on ground so he jumps off to get it. Once he is consistently jumping off cue/say “OFF” right before you toss the treat on the floor.

8. Repeat UP and OFF making jumping in/out of your lap a fun game!
Notes for teaching “up” or “lap”

- Always observe the dog’s body language throughout the process. A dog may change his mind about the interaction midway so keep “listening.”

- If you see any stress signals (stiffening, tucked tail, side eye, paw lift etc.) ignore the dog and do not approach.

- If body language is loose, happy and wiggly – touch away!

- Always allow the dog the option to walk away.
Teaching “Hugs” (permission to pick up)

• Wait for the dog to put his front paws on your leg.

• If you have a dog who consistently does this, catch him at the beginning of his jump up and cue “Hugs.”

• Usually the only reward needed is to pet or pick up the dog.
For the dog uncomfortable with any handling and/or equipment...

What is a Counter conditioning and Desensitization Protocol?

1. Identify triggers. Examples: hand coming toward body/head/feet, equipment (harness, collar, leash), picking up, someone entering space...

2. Present trigger at distance dog is still comfortable and give high value treat

3. Continue to pair treat with trigger always staying at level dog is relaxed, gradually getting closer. EXAMPLE...
For the dog uncomfortable with any handling and/or equipment...

**EXAMPLE of DSCC for handling:**

- Hand reached towards dog=treat appears. Repeat until dog does not care about the hand, even “likes” (happy anticipation) the hand coming towards him.
- Touch side of dog=treat. Note: pet dog on side closest to you so dog is free to walk away easily if he chooses. Repeat as above.
- Scratch side of dog=treat
- Continue as needed for handling
Paw Handling
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