



Vision Australia
Seeing Eye Dogs

Cooperative care

Puppy development



2023
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Cooperative care

Introduction

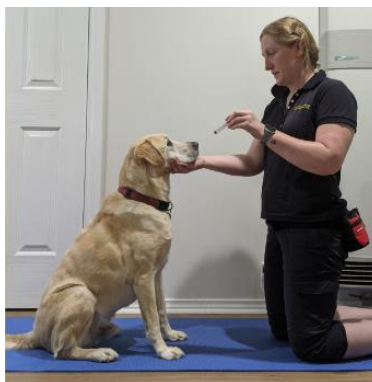
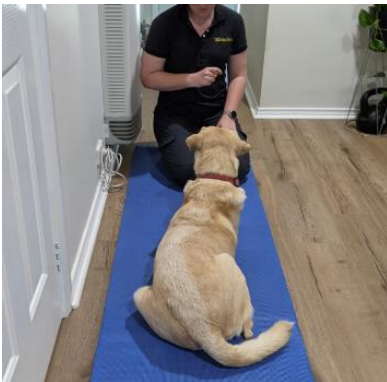
The cooperative care training program has been developed to reduce the potential for stress that can occur during medical procedures.

The key element in cooperative care is providing the dog with the ability to choose and to give consent. By allowing the dog to make decisions in regards to their health care we build trust and empower the dog to feel comfortable and confident.

We teach the dogs to use trained behaviours to signal their consent for us to touch, treat, examine or medicate them. It is important that we listen and stop what we are doing if they dog moves away or ceases engaging in a behaviour. The behaviours act as “go” or “no go” signals, if they engage in the behaviour we can go ahead, if they disengage we stop. While this might sound counterintuitive, the process is very effective in building confidence and engagement in health care procedures.

The core behaviours we use are:

- Stationing
- Chin rest
- Roll over



The cooperative care program has been formed as part of the larger Seeing Eye Dogs welfare project. The welfare project is based upon the principles of Care and Choice to promote best welfare outcomes for all our animals.

This manual contains all the information needed to train the core behaviours and teach the consent process. There is also a playlist of complimentary training videos that can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLgkiCKDq70y9wXOiPcCsPFp5lbp2ck3wl>

Co-operative care - Training plan for Behaviours

General notes

- One person assigned to train the husbandry behaviours
- Do not use the behaviours for procedures until the behaviour is fully trained
- If procedures need to be performed, this should be done in a different context to the training (I.e. no yoga mat, different location etc.).
- **Always remember this is cooperative care, dog needs to be active participant in the behaviour and any coercion will withdraw from the trust account**
- This is a two way conversation between trainer and dog
- The dog should be able to consent and be allowed to opt out of the behaviour if uncomfortable
- Once behaviour is trained, it is important to continue to practice often without the actual procedure occurring so that more often it is just a rewarding session.
- The length of the training session (particularly desensitisation) is guided by the dog

Behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Station on yoga mat – General exam• Chin rest – Administering medication• Roll over – examine/treat underside
Reinforcements	<p>As per the dogs preferences, examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kibble• Zivi Peak• Liver treats• Cheese• Toys <p>If the dog is prone to weight gain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take training reinforcers out of daily meal allowance• Use low fat treats such as Royal Canin Educ
Equipment	<p>Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Treat pouch with reinforcement• Yoga mat (all behaviours) <p>Desensitisation (including but not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Syringe• Gloves• Alcohol wipes• Electric toothbrush/hair clippers• Spoon

Station on yoga mat– General exam

Goal – The dog remains stationed on a yoga mat, handler can move around, perform health check without dog breaking position. Expectation is for handler to give the dog a break after maintaining station for approx. 2 minutes, even during medical exams for the dogs wellbeing. Station will ideally be in a stand.

How to teach yoga mat station:

Begin teaching this behaviour in a quiet location where the dog is comfortable, before generalising to other locations including veterinary exam rooms:

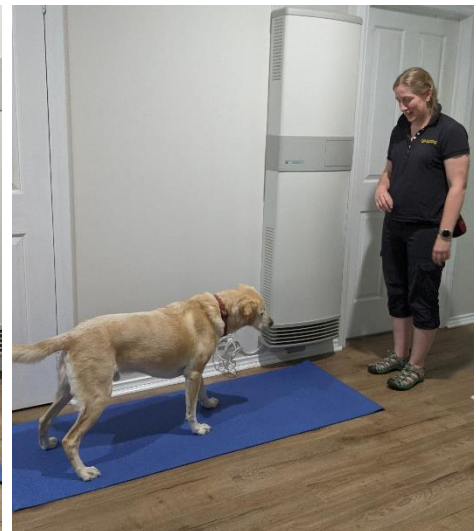
- Place mat parallel to wall allowing you to walk past it with dog on the left
- Walk with dog towards the mat marking when all 4 paws on mat, reinforce several times while stationary. Repeat
- Start to build duration into the stand. Once in position, Step away, return, reinforce, gradually building distance away and time held on mat.
- Once duration is built to 2 minutes start to introduce touching in the manner of health check – see [desensitisation](#) section for detail on how to manage this.

Key points:

- Stations on a yoga mat
- Relaxed
- Choice to opt out
- Give breaks after 2 min

Cue:

- Point to mat
- “Station” verbal



Equipment for desensitisation:

- Touches
- Gloves

Chin rest – Administering Medication

Goal – The dog stations on the yoga mat and rests chin on handlers palm with pressure and duration. Handler should be able to touch or medicate dog while they remain in position. Regular breaks should be given to the dog for longer examinations or as and when they need them. Can transfer behaviour to chin rest on handlers lap allowing two hands for eye or ear medications.

Key points:

- Relaxed – rests weight of head on hand or lap
- Choice to opt out
- Give breaks after 2 min

Cue:

- Hand presentation
- “Chin” verbal

How to teach chin rest:

Begin teaching this behaviour in a quiet location where the dog is comfortable before generalising to other locations including veterinary exam rooms. Set up yoga mat in chosen training location:

Begin teaching basic chin rest – cue is flat palm

- Present flat hand touching under chin and reward, repeat
- Present flat hand approx. 1cm below chin, reward any touches of chin to hand
- Gradually present hand further away from chin

Refine chin rest

- Accept only firm definitive touches
- Once dog is giving good solid touches reliably, move to next step - duration

Build duration

- Begin to delay marking the behaviour to stretch out time chin is resting on hand
- Intermittently reward different duration of chin rests

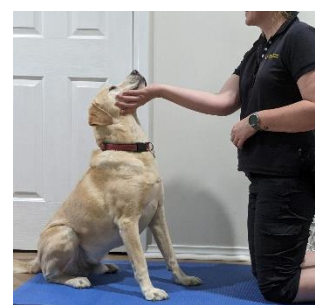
Add movement

- Ask for chin rest
- Slowly raise hand so nose is pointing in air
- If pup moves chin away, stop then ask them to reoffer and try again

Commence the process of desensitisation

Equipment for desensitisation:

- Touches
- Syringe
- Gloves
- Eye drops bottle



Roll over – examine/treat underside

Goal – The dog stations on yoga mat and rolls onto side on cue. Dog should be comfortable to be touched/examined or medicated. Dog should be allowed to opt out by breaking position if they are uncomfortable. Regular breaks should be given for longer exams or as and when dog needs.

How to teach roll over:

Begin teaching this behaviour in a quiet location where the dog is comfortable before generalising to other locations including veterinary exam rooms. Set up yoga mat in chosen training location:

- Start with dog in a down, paying attention to which hip they are resting on, we will be rolling the dog over towards that side.
- Begin by luring the dog's head – hold several kibbles in your hand close to their nose, move your hand to turn their head so their nose points towards their bottom, mark and reinforce with one treat.
- Continue to move your hand, gently guiding their nose backwards so that their shoulder touches the ground, mark and reinforce.
- Continue to lure them around until their head is rested on the ground, mark and reinforce several times in position. Release
- Gradually reduce the presence of the lure. Still using food in the hand, only mark once head is on the ground and several times once in position.
- Remove food from hand while still following the same path, mark and reinforce with food from treat pouch. If dog is inclined to sit back up, you can gently rest a hand on their shoulder to help them maintain position.
- Once they are comfortable lying on their side you can start to introduce touching and equipment as per the [desensitisation](#) instructions.

Equipment for desensitisation:

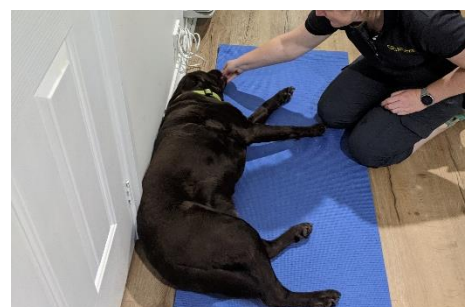
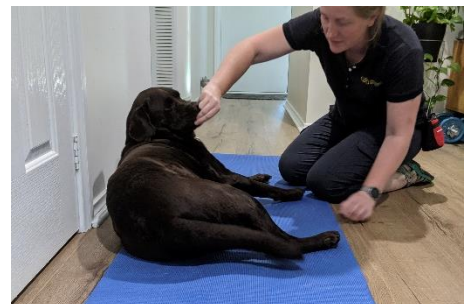
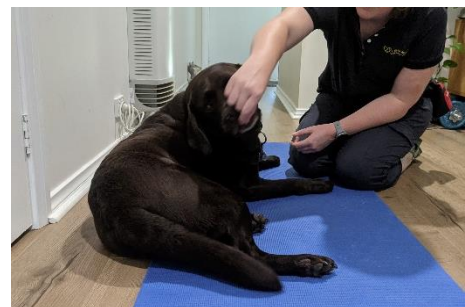
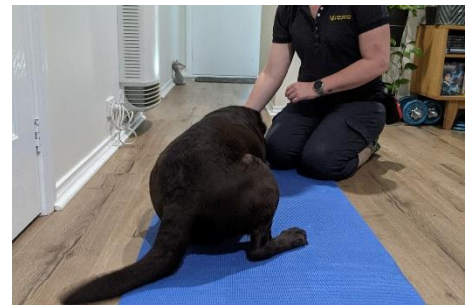
- Touches
- Gloves

Key points:

- Relaxed – lays willingly on side with duration
- Choice to opt out
- Give breaks after 2 min

Cue:

- “Over” verbal



Desensitisation

Goal – Teach the dog choice and consent in the use of examination/touch and equipment during medical procedures. The aim will be to desensitise the dog to the most common equipment used including the sounds, scents and feelings, by giving them the choice to opt out at any point if they are feeling uncomfortable. This will also include the vet room or exam rooms in which most procedures will take place.

Key points:

- Relaxed
- Choice to opt out
- Dog gives consent
- Work with one object/location at a time

How to implement the desensitisation process:

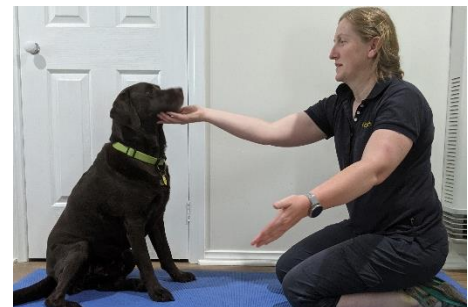
We use each behaviour as the dogs communicating to us that they are willing to take part in the session. If we cue the behaviour and the dog responds but moves away as soon as we go to touch them or show them equipment, we must stop what we are doing and wait for the dog to return and offer the behaviour again or they respond to our request for the behaviour. While this seems counter intuitive, it gives the dogs a way to communicate with us and confidence that we will listen to them if they are not comfortable or ready. When given the choice to participate with us dogs will always choose to have that opportunity to connect and receive reinforcement.

We can commence this process once the trained behaviours are reliable. We will do this first in a familiar quiet location for the dog. Once we have completed the process there we can then begin the process again in other locations such as vet rooms.

Step 1: Get the dog used to hands moving around whilst they maintain the cued behaviour:

- When the dog is performing the cued behaviour or station, slowly make movements with your hands. Initially out to the side and if they are ok with that then you can begin to move your hand towards the dog.
- Each time you move your hands and the dog remains in the cued behaviour or station, mark and reinforce.
- If the dog breaks the position, without saying anything move your hand away or behind your back.
- When the dog returns to the behaviour or responds to a cue for that behaviour. Mark and reinforce.
- Repeat this process until the dog maintains the behaviour while your hand is moving around and towards them.

If at any time the dog disengages, or wants to go off and do something else, that's o.k. Just stop that session and try again later.



This is the most important phase of this exercise. It empowers the dog to have a choice in how long the training goes for, when and how close your hand gets to them. By transferring some of the control over a situation to the dog you will see the results and how much they enjoy doing this exercise and eventually being medicated or examined.

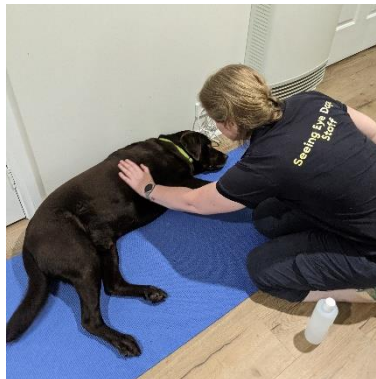
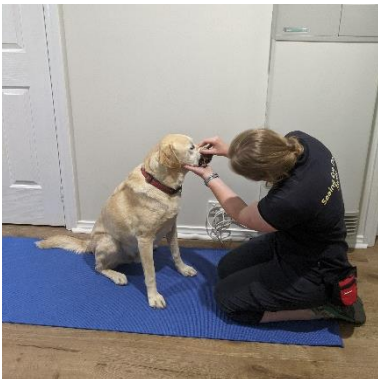
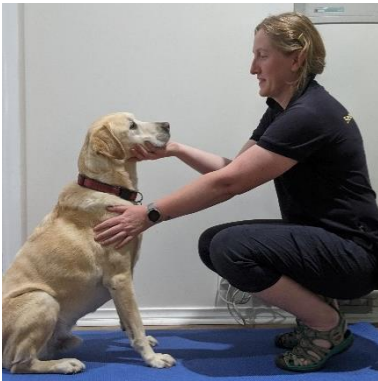
Step 2: Introduce touches

Now that the dog is used to your hand moving around them in the cued behaviour, we can start to introduce some touches using the same process.

Start by touching your puppy on their shoulder, or body. If your dog breaks from the behaviour or station, stop the touch and put your hand down or behind your back. When the dog returns to the behaviour or station or responds to your cue to do so, mark and reinforce. Then try again.

Slowly build up the duration of the touch, the location of the touch (from body to head or required location). Once they are comfortable with basic touches, start to use touch to mimic some equipment (gentle pinching of the skin on the arm or manipulation of position of leg to replicate blood draw for example).

Always remember when the dog breaks away from the behaviour or station, you must stop the game. If the dog wishes to continue they will return to position or respond to the cue, if not they may disengage totally and that's the end of that session.

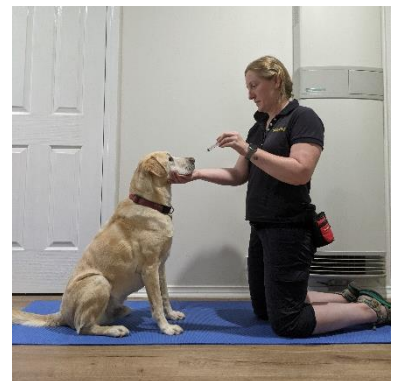
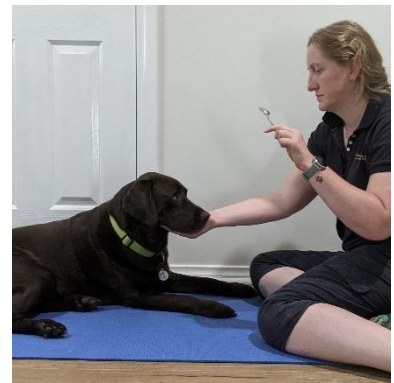
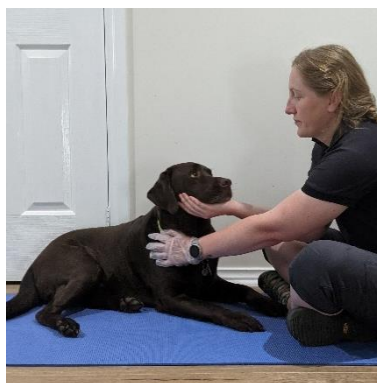
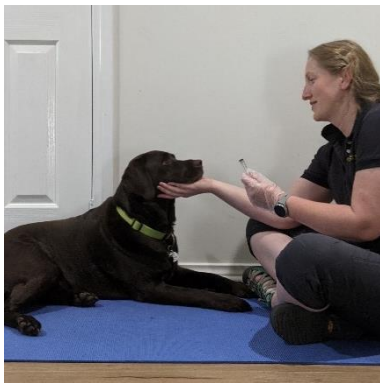


Step 3: Introduce equipment

The final step will be to introduce the equipment, doing so slowly so that the dog gets used to the equipment being present first, then touching them, then making sounds away from them, then making sounds touching them etc. Each cued behaviour or station will have certain equipment that needs to be used in that scenario (refer to equipment section in each behaviour training info).

If at any stage you feel like you are not progressing or things are not working for you, please stop practicing the game and let your trainer know. They will be able to give you some helpful hints to get you back on track.

The most important thing is to empower the dog to make positive decisions. This game takes as long as the individual dog needs for them to be comfortable with the procedures. Don't push the dog to participate, and practice.



If the dog is uncomfortable entering the vet or examination room:

Use a similar desensitisation process but for approaching and entering the vet room. Walk towards the door, reinforce if dog comes with you, then turn and walk away. Repeat this aiming to gradually get closer and eventually in the room. If the dog wants to back away let them, wait for them to settle before approaching again or reinforce the dog if they choose to move towards the room without you.

Once they are in the room, reinforce heavily, play with their favourite toy, play the nose touch game, whatever the dog enjoys, then leave. Practice this often so that the largest percentage of time they spend in the room is enjoyable and the least amount of time is having a procedure.

Guidelines for completing procedures during training

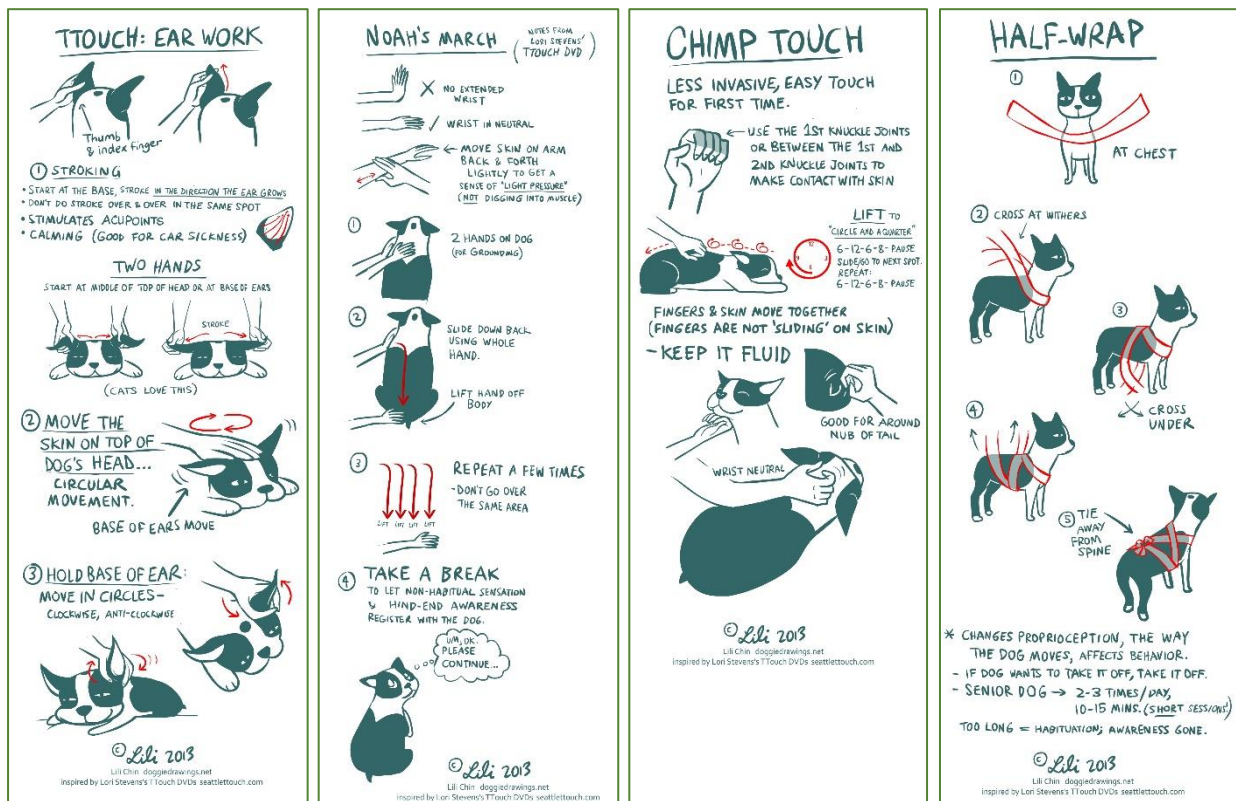
If at any point during training the dog needs to have medical procedures completed, there are some guidelines to follow to ensure the training is unaffected and the dog experiences minimal stress.

Option 1: If the training is almost ready to be rolled out and it is possible to delay the procedure for a short time in order to complete the training and trail the cooperative care routine.

Option 2: If the training is still in early stages and not ready to be rolled out or procedure cannot be delayed:

- The person doing the training should not be involved in doing the procedure
- The procedure should (if possible) be carried out in a place where the dog is comfortable (for example if the dog needs desensitisation to the vet room, complete the procedure in the kennel or outdoor play area ensuring it is a different location to where training occurs)
- Do not use the yoga mat as we want to completely change the context
- Provide reinforcements upon entering the treatment area and throughout procedure
- People involved in the procedure should be relaxed and not in a rush
- To aid the dog in feeling relaxed take time to use some TTouch massage or wrap (below)
- Use low stress restraint techniques (restrain only enough to maintain position or not at all if possible and where appropriate let dog choose the position; sit, down, stand)
- Reward the dog with high value treats during the procedure (sachets of cat food, tube of vegemite, tube of peanut butter etc.)
- Give the dog regular breaks if they are stressed or it is a longer procedure

TTouch massage techniques and wraps that have a calming effect:



Guidelines for doing procedures once behaviours have been trained

Once the behaviours have been trained and the dog is regularly maintaining those behaviours or stations while equipment is presented or they are touched, the next stage is to expand the training session to include completing the desired medical procedure.

Key points:

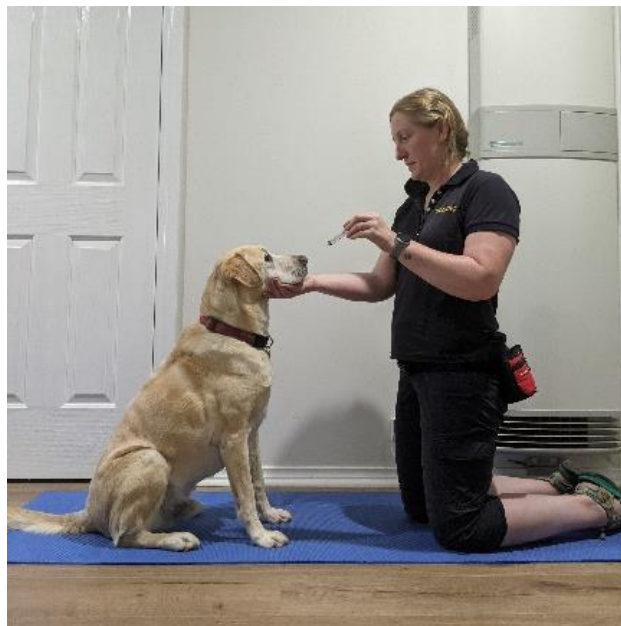
- Relaxed
- Choice to opt out
- Dog gives consent to the procedure

It is important to note that even once the behaviours are reliable we must still conduct the medical procedure in the same manner:

- Entering the vet room, vet to provide reinforcements and greet the dog
- If time permits or the dog/handler is looking anxious engage in TTouch massage
- Cue the behaviour or station
- Begin with some easy touches or similar to prepare the dog and let them earn reinforcements
- Bring out the equipment reinforce them for maintaining behaviour or station
- Practice touching them with the equipment
- Complete the procedure
- Release the dog
- Recue the behaviour/station and practice easy touches to finish

If at any point the dog breaks away from the behaviour or station, stop what you are doing, move equipment away and wait for the dog to reengage in the behaviour or station or they respond to the cue, then try again. **The dog must always give consent.**

As the dogs confidence grows and they become more familiar with the process the amount of prep needed will likely reduce, however training sessions should continue to take place both at home and in the vet room so that there are more opportunities to play “the cooperation game” without resulting medical procedure which will build huge trust account balances and tolerance to procedures.



Cooperative care: Puppy Development: 2023 V1