



The Bucket Game

This is a great strategy for helping dogs stay calm and still with handling, but most importantly it gives them the ability to opt in, and out, of being handled. This helps boost confidence and makes the experience much less stressful

To play:

You will need: A small bowl (your “bucket”) filled with plenty of small food rewards.

1. Stand in front of your dog and hold your bucket at waist height. If your dog looks at the bucket but doesn't move towards it, mark 'good' and take a treat from the bucket and deliver it to their mouth.

If they move towards the bucket, lift it higher.

2. Gradually lower the bucket towards the floor, moving a few inches at a time. At each new height, if your dog looks at the bucket without moving towards it, mark and deliver a treat from the bucket to their mouth

If your dog tries to go towards the bucket, simply lift it away, wait for them to hold still, then try again.

3. Repeat step three until you can place the bucket on the ground around a foot away from your dog without them moving towards it.

4. Start to deliver treats to your dog for staying still and looking at the bucket. Reward fairly rapidly to start with, then gradually increase the time between treats to up to five seconds.

If they move towards the bucket, move it a little further away and reduce the duration between treats.

5. Reach toward your dog's shoulder, but don't make contact. If they continue to look at the bowl, mark and reward from the bowl. If they look at you or your hand, pause, wait for him to settle, and retry.

If your dog continues to look away from the bucket you need to hold your hand further away until you find the spot where they're comfortable.

6. Repeat as above, gradually moving your hand closer at each rep until you can touch them gently on the shoulder without them looking away from the bucket.

7. Gently stroke them on the shoulder, continuing to reward for holding still. Looking away from the bucket is your dog's way of saying 'no thanks'. If this happens, throw a treat away to reset them. If they come back by themselves, continue the game. If they don't pick up and try again later.

8. Repeat steps 5-7 on various parts of their body, until you can stroke them all over while they look at the bucket.

9. Introduce your grooming/vet tools in the same way you introduced touch in step 5.

The key with this game is to go slow and steady. Keep sessions short, around five minutes.

Always listen to their 'no thank you' by pausing and allowing them to move away.

Your dog is free to walk away at any time. If they do, reduce the intensity by either holding the hand/tool further away or reducing how long you touch them for.