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Stationing Your Dog for Nail Trims

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When your dog offers a consent behavior, they are giving permission for something to happen. It is the “green light” that communicates your dog is ready to participate in a procedure. If they move out of position, it is the “red light” to stop. Training consent behaviors builds confidence, promotes force-free learning, and increases your pet’s cooperation.

Stationing is beneficial for nail trims as well as veterinary and husbandry procedures. The goal of stationing your dog for nail trims is four paws on the yoga or non-slip bathmat, couch, chair, or low platform. Choose a station that is comfortable and secure, so your pet does not slip or slide. Platforms should be easy for your pet to get on and off. Sit works well for front paws and a relaxed down is beneficial to trim both front and back paws.

When your dog is in position on the station, consent training begins. They can leave the station when they want to stop the training session, proceeding when the dog chooses to return. To teach this behavior, reward for small steps towards the goal.

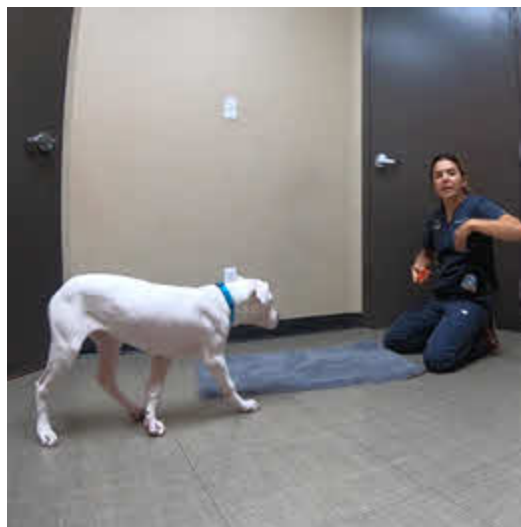


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If you begin with a mat, place it on the ground or onto the elevated surface. Mark and treat the dog for any movement toward the mat. Treats can be placed onto the mat to encourage the dog to go onto the mat quickly.



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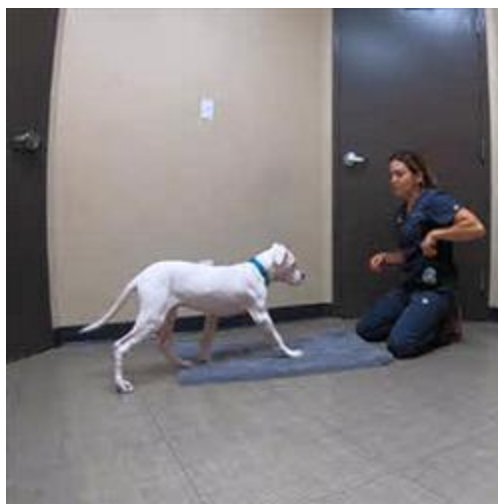


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Mark and treat as your dog places each additional paw on the mat, until all four paws are in position.



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A relaxed down on the station is ideal to access front and back paws easily for nail trimming. Mark and treat your dog for sitting on the mat and place the treat on the mat in front of their paws. A food lure can be used to help guide them into a sit position.

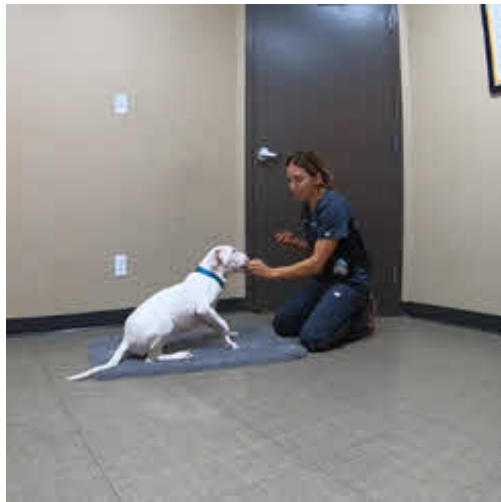


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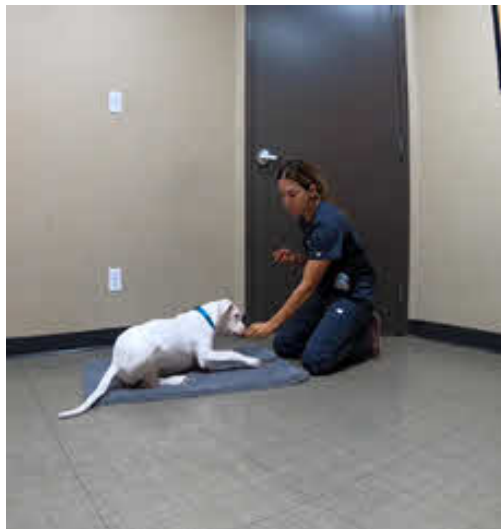


Photo Courtesy of Jessica Benoit RVT, VTS (Behavior), KPA CTP, CPDT-KA, EFFCP
Continue to mark and treat your dog as they move their front paws forward into a down position. If they need additional help, lure into the down position by placing a treat near their nose, moving it downward to the ground, and then away from their paws in an “L” position.



Photo Courtesy of Jessica Benoit RVT, VTS (Behavior), KPA CTP, CPDT-KA, EFFCP
In the relaxed down, mark and treat the dog for 3-5 repetitions when they are resting on one hip. Then toss the treat off the mat so they can repeat the pattern of moving onto the mat, then into the down position. Tossing treats off the station is encouraged to give your dog a break and to offer them a choice to participate by returning to the station.

If a lure is used to guide the dog into a down position, fade the lure as soon as possible. Pretend to have a treat in your hand and guide the dog into position. Mark for the down position, feed the treat, then toss the next treat away from the station. Wait to see if your dog will offer the behavior on their own, then mark and reward. This may take several repetitions.

With practice, your dog will offer a relaxed down on the station as the “green light” consent behavior to begin paw handling and eventually trim nails. If your dog leaves the mat and chooses to return, give a reward as soon as they step onto the mat. Once they station consistently during training, paw handling and nail trims can be trained using this consent indicator. This behavior is not often placed on a verbal cue since the station, nail trimmers and the position of the owner’s body become the cues for nail trimming.

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