

## Getting Started as a Junior Dog Handler

**Junior Handling lets participants learn to groom and show a variety of dog breeds.**

*By Allan Reznik*

Q. What advice do you have for junior handlers? And what advice do you have for showing small dogs like Shih Tzu?

A. I think Junior Handling is a wonderful activity. Besides the obvious things it offers participants like learning to groom and show a variety of dog breeds, it teaches important life skills as well, like handling disappointment with grace.

As you know, it is the junior's handling ability that is judged rather than the conformation of the dog. So, if your family dog is purebred and registered, you can enter and put him through his paces.

I encourage juniors to learn to show a wide variety of dogs. A push-button show dog that never sets a foot wrong may win ribbons for you, but won't teach you much.

I grew up in Canada where a junior could sign up with any dog entered in the show. Although my family had a Beagle and then a Standard Poodle, neither was a show dog. I fell in love with sighthounds and got to handle many, but I also worked with Newfoundlands that required us to coordinate our timing, and Shelties that I was expected to free bait. Those experiences with different breeds took me out of my comfort zone and taught me so much.

Even if the show rules require you to show your own dog, let breeder friends know that you would like to work with other breeds. Exhibitors are bound to have a conflict now and then, with two of their dogs needing to be shown at the same time. That's a great way to earn experience and expand your repertoire.

The Shih Tzu is, of course, a table breed. You need to start early with breeds that are tabled so they will take the examination in stride.

Grooming is a major part of Shih Tzu presentation.

If you bought your Shih Tzu from a good breeder, let her know you are interested in showing, and want to learn from her. Otherwise, join your local all-breed kennel club and Shih Tzu club so you can meet other exhibitors to learn from and perhaps handle for.