

Grooming a Puppy Who Doesn't Like to Be Touched

Training and socializing your puppy is key to successful trips to the groomer.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. We have a very active 5-month-old Pomeranian. I'm not sure when he should be groomed and how often. He doesn't like anyone other than my mother and me so he won't allow anyone else to touch him. How are dogs treated at the grooming shop? Are the pets sedated for the duration?

A. It might give you a chuckle but your pint-sized Pomeranian is part of the Northern Dog family just like the Husky and Samoyed but no, he was not bred to pull sleds for elves! Over the years, Pomeranians have been bred down in size from their larger German Spitz ancestors. Today's most sought-after examples of this breed weigh in at just three to seven pounds. Although the Pom is now a beloved Toy breed and darling of the senior citizen set, it still retains that feisty streak that is getting your furry little friend into trouble.

Teaching him to accept handling by humans other than you and your mother is of the utmost importance. Be patient rather than punitive; it can be scary to be such a small dog in a big world. When these little peanuts are uneasy and frightened, they growl and bite as a survival technique, not just because they are being fresh. It's time for you to get serious with the socializing process which should have begun back with his breeder even before you brought him home.

He needs to get used to being held and handled by everyone in the family, even children who have been taught to be gentle and careful. Start introducing him to trusted friends who understand his behavior issues by sitting next to them on the sofa as you hold him and pet him. Have them offer him a treat and eventually touch and hold him too. Do not reinforce his antisocial behavior by having the person get scared off, teaching the tiny terror that he does indeed rule the world. If he doesn't learn to trust other people during puppyhood, this fear response will always be with him.

During the first six months of his life, a puppy needs to meet people of every size, shape and variety. Take him to the park and just sit on a bench with him. Carry him around the mall or flea market. Sign him up for puppy kindergarten. The more you do to build his confidence, the better. Otherwise, you will end up having to confine your dog every time you have company and dealing with a meltdown every time he goes to the groomer or the vet.

The Pom has a plush double coat that requires lots of brushing to keep from getting matted or packed with shed undercoat that gets stuck in it. In our salon, we usually see these fluffy little beauties on a four- to six-week basis. Although they do not require haircuts, some owners like to have them trimmed and shaped to make upkeep easier between visits. Their ears are edged with thinning shears to look neat and natural, nails trimmed and paws tidied up to resemble what we call "cat feet."

In our salon, we do not sedate pets. That is a veterinary procedure and we are not qualified to do it nor do we want to. Some owners may give their pets a calming herbal product, such as "Rescue Remedy," prior to grooming to ease their stress, and we do try to get our more nervous canine clients in and out as quickly as possible.

If you devote yourself to training and socializing your dog, he should not need to be drugged in order to withstand normal activities like going to the groomer. Bearing in mind the thousands of unfortunate dogs who end up in shelters every year because they have not been socialized and trained, I wish you success in getting this precious puppy used to living comfortably in your world.