

Get Your Puppy Used to Grooming

How to help a long-haired puppy who doesn't like brushing.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. I have a 4-month-old Shih Tzu-Yorkshire Terrier puppy that I try to brush daily. How can I get her to enjoy brushing without trying to nip at the brush and my fingers?

A. When your puppy was with her littermates, her mother set limits with her puppies by “scruffing” them – grabbing onto the loose neck skin on top of their body to put an end to rowdy behavior when things got out of hand. That’s now your job but I recommend verbal reprimands and positive reinforcement to get your point across.

I don’t know if your puppy will ever enjoy brushing but she must learn to tolerate it. If you end the brushing every time she nips, she will learn that her naughty antics pay off– they make you stop grooming her. But like a human baby, she needs her hair combed regularly so she needs to get used to the process.

You are right to make it part of her daily routine. Perhaps if you do it after a walk or a vigorous playtime, she will be a bit tired and less feisty. To make it easier on your back, place her on a table rather than holding her in your lap or getting down on the floor. A fold-up grooming table with an adjustable post and grooming noose to help secure your puppy can be purchased for under \$100.

To get her accustomed to the brush and comb, start at the same spot each time. I like to begin on a rear leg, starting at the bottom and “line brushing” each section, lifting the hair and gently brushing it out from the body with a slicker brush as I work my way around the puppy. If she attacks you or the brush, let out a loud yelp just like her siblings did. You’ll be speaking her language! You can also verbally reprimand her with a firm “no!”

Even if you brush only one quarter of her body each day for starters, you will get her used to the procedure and let her know that you are the leader of the pack. After brushing, check your work with a stainless steel comb to make sure you’ve gotten rid of all mats and snarls. End the session with a tasty treat and lots of praise.

I would also recommend obedience training for your puppy. It will build your bond and strengthen your leadership. If her behavior continues to be a problem, some private sessions with a trainer will help through this rough patch.

Her mixed parentage includes two breeds with coats that mat easily. At four months of age, she is old enough for professional grooming if she has had her second series of shots. A short “puppy cut” will make her much easier to maintain. Your groomer will thank you for teaching her some manners at home.

Kathy Salzberg, NCMG, is a Certified Master Groomer and writer who has been grooming pets since 1976. With her daughter Missi, she owns The Village Groomer in Walpole, Mass. She has also written extensively on pet care for several consumer magazines and authored three books on dogs and careers with pets. Kathy lives with her pets on Cape Cod.

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