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BUILDING COMFORT DURING BATHS

This protocol describes a combination of desensitization (small steps of gradual exposure) and counter-conditioning (creating a more positive emotional response) to bathing. ***The exposure must happen first and THEN the treat is delivered***, so be sure not to make any movements that alert the dog to the fact that food is coming until just after the exposure has occurred.

The steps below are general suggestions – some dogs won't need such small steps to achieve success (though it never hurts to build in baby steps), while other dogs may need steps to be broken down a little smaller so as not to overwhelm them.

PREPARATORY STEPS:

#1

- Introduce dog to a lick mat in a neutral location. It can be smudged with high value food like PB, cream cheese, or jarred meat baby food. Something like this: https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07FS2MWR8/?ref=exp_northstarcanines_dp_vv_d
- Introduce dog to having various parts of her body wiped with a DRY, soft wash cloth. Begin with just one swipe of the cloth, then treat. Do a single swipe in various areas of her body, and give a treat each time. Gradually increase the number of swipes you do before treating.
- Introduce dog, as above, using a slightly damp & warm cloth. Treat/repeat.
- Introduce dog, as above, using a wet cloth. Treat/repeat.

#2

- Set a dry towel on your kitchen floor. Lift dog onto that towel. Treat when she's on it. Repeat a number of times, until she's very relaxed about this.
- Now, lift her onto a warm and damp towel, treat and repeat.
- Now, lift her onto a wet towel, treat and repeat.
 - If dog is uncomfortable being lifted onto the towel at first, allow her to walk onto it herself, and treat each time she makes even minor contact with it. Gradually expect her to step further onto the towel before treating.

#3

- Hold her in your arms*, then turn on the water at just a trickle in NON-BATH area. Treat and repeat. If the sound of the water or the proximity to the faucet is too stressful, one person can hold the dog at a distance away while another person controls the faucet. Every time the water is turned on, give a treat.
- Gradually open up tap further so more water comes out. Treat and repeat.
- Gradually decrease your distance from faucet.
- Repeat steps above at bath-area faucet.

**Note: if dog is too big to hold in your arms, just crouch and gently hold her close to you while her feet remain on the floor. Or, you can have the dog stand on a large, sturdy ottoman to get her closer to faucet and thus able to see the water flow.*

PULLING THE ELEMENTS TOGETHER:

- To ensure the bottom of bath area isn't slippery, place a towel down for better footing.
- Get the dog comfortable being lifted into DRY bath area. Treat lavishly while in that location. You could also set up the lick mat there. Repeat until she's very happy with this step.
- Now, while she's in the dry bath area, reintroduce gentle swipes on her body with a dry cloth. Treat and repeat.
- Next, use gentle swipes with a pre-dampened and warm cloth. (Don't wet the cloth with the faucet right there.) Treat and repeat.
- Next, use a wet cloth to wipe her body. Treat and repeat.
- Next, lift her into bath area with an already-damp towel laid in there. Treat and repeat.
- Gradually make the towel wetter as she's ready for more challenge.
- Next, turn on tap briefly, at just a bare trickle. Treat and repeat. Gradually increase how long the tap is open before delivering a treat.
- Increase water flow gradually.
- Now, fold in the use of the wet cloth to wipe her body. Gradually, the cloth should become more saturated so that water is gently flowing from it onto her body. When she's comfortable with that, it should be easy to transition to filling a small container with warm water and gently pouring that on.