



THE DOGGY DIGEST

TRAINING TIPS BROUGHT TO YOU BY MUTTS WITH MANNERS

Targeting: Teaching the Touch Behavior to Build Confidence
By Trelle Dandridge - Mutts with Manners

Why Teach “Touch”?

Teaching a dog to touch a person’s hand with their nose is a simple but powerful behavior:

- Confidence Builder: It gives dogs a clear, predictable “job” they can succeed at, which reduces anxiety.
- Positive Association: Approaching a hand becomes a game with rewards, instead of a source of fear.
- Choice & Control: The dog chooses when to make contact, helping them feel safe and empowered.
- Stranger Danger Tool: “Touch” can later be used in controlled sessions to help fearful dogs approach strangers at their own pace.

Training Foundations

- Use Positive Reinforcement: Pair every successful touch with a reward (treat, praise, or play).
- Keep Sessions Short: Just 2–3 minutes at a time to prevent stress or boredom.
- Let the Dog Lead: If your dog hesitates or walks away, give space and try again later.
- Start in a Calm Environment: Begin at home before adding distractions or strangers.

Step-by-Step Training Plan

Step 1: Introducing the Cue

1. Present your open hand or fist a few inches from the dog’s nose.
2. When the dog sniffs or touches your hand—even accidentally—mark it with “Yes!” or a click, and reward.
3. Repeat until your dog consistently bumps your hand with their nose.

Step 2: Adding the Word

1. Say “Touch” as you present your hand.
2. Reward every successful nose bump.
3. Gradually vary your hand position (slightly to the side, higher, lower) to strengthen the behavior.

Step 3: Building Distance & Confidence

1. Present your hand farther away so the dog takes a step to reach it.
2. Reward generously for movement and confidence.
3. Practice in different rooms and eventually outdoors, keeping distractions minimal at first.



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Using "Touch" With Stranger Fear

This skill connects directly to helping dogs with fear of strangers:

- Bridge Between Fear & Trust: Instead of being forced to greet, the dog gets to "play a game" they know well.
- Choice-Based Approach: The stranger can present a hand (low, to the side, non-threatening), but the dog chooses whether to interact.
- Predictable Outcome: Every time the dog hears "Touch," they know exactly what to do and what reward follows.

With a Leash

- Keep the leash loose. Allow the dog to decide if they're comfortable moving forward to "Touch."
- Reward even small efforts, like stepping toward the hand or glancing at it.

Without a Leash (safe space)

- Let the dog approach at their own pace.
- If they hesitate, reduce the distance or have the stranger turn sideways to be less intimidating.
- End on a successful note, even if it's just the dog calmly observing the hand from a distance.

Key Takeaway

Teaching "Touch" isn't just a trick—it's a confidence exercise and a communication tool. It helps dogs feel successful, gives them control in stressful situations, and creates a bridge for working with stranger fears. Over time, this simple behavior can become a powerful part of your dog's coping toolbox.