

A FREE GUIDE FROM FUR SURE GROOMING

The Calm Grooming Guide



*For anxious dogs
and the owners who love them.*

12 pages of gentle, practical advice

Fur Sure Grooming

North Denver Metro · fursuregrooming.com



If your dog dreads grooming day, *this guide is for you.*

I want to tell you about Mila.

Mila is the rescue I adopted a few years back. The first salon I took her to, she came home shaking. I felt sick about it. I'd done what every dog owner is supposed to do, and somehow it had ended with my dog cowering under the bed.

That night I made a list of everything that had gone wrong. The cage. The hours of waiting. The dryers. The strange dogs. The hand-off between three different groomers. None of it had anything to do with whether Mila needed grooming. All of it had to do with the place doing the grooming.

So, my wife and I started Fur Sure Grooming; a mobile, one-on-one, cage-free experience built around dogs like Mila. In the years since, I've met hundreds of owners going through what I went through. Smart, loving people who can't figure out why their dog hates something that should be routine.

So I wrote this guide. Not to sell you anything, though I'd love to groom your dog if you ever want me to, but because the questions I get over and over deserve real answers in a place you can come back to.

Thanks for trusting me with a few minutes of your time, and your dog's happiness.

— *Jacob & Mila*

Fur Sure Grooming · Westminster, CO

What's *inside*.

Seven short chapters. Each one designed to be useful on its own — so you can jump straight to what you need, or read it start to finish

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"Read this in one sitting if you can. Then keep it somewhere you'll find it again — your phone, your fridge, your dog's grooming bag — for the moments you need it." — Jacob

Why grooming anxiety happens.

Most grooming anxiety isn't about grooming. It's about everything that surrounds it.

If your dog dreads grooming day, it's almost never because they hate being clean. Dogs are pragmatic — they learn associations fast, and they hold onto bad ones for a long time. What looks like "anxiety about grooming" is usually anxiety about something specific that happens during grooming. Once you identify the trigger, you can almost always work around it.

The four most common triggers

1. Confinement

Cages between bath, dry, and cut. For a social dog or a rescue with separation history, hours of being shut in a small space with unfamiliar sounds is the single biggest stressor — bigger than the bath itself.

2. Forced-air dryers

The high-velocity dryers most salons use are loud, hot, and feel like being held in a windstorm. Sensitive dogs flinch, panic, and learn that the dryer means trouble. The bath might have been fine; the dryer is what got remembered.

3. Strange dogs & smells

A salon is a peak-stress environment. Barking, conflicting pheromones, the scent of fear from the dog who was there an hour ago. Even a confident dog gets keyed up.

4. Handler hand-offs

In a busy salon, your dog might be passed between three or four groomers in one appointment. To your dog, that's three strangers in a row, each handling their tail or paws or face. Some dogs love everyone — most don't.

The good news

Every one of these triggers can be removed or reduced. The next chapters show you how — at home, and when choosing where to get your dog groomed.

The 5 signs your dog is *grooming-anxious*

Some signs are obvious — shaking, hiding. Others are easy to miss.

01

They hide when they hear the brush, water, or scissors

A dog with a negative association doesn't wait for the actual grooming — they react to the cue. If your dog disappears the moment you pick up a brush or turn on the bathtub, the anxiety is real.

02

They shake, pant, or drool when you arrive at the salon

Excessive panting in a temperature-controlled space, trembling, or drooling are stress responses, not heat responses. Some dogs also yawn repeatedly (a "calming signal") or refuse food they normally love.

03

They come home more exhausted than the appointment length explains

A 90-minute groom shouldn't leave your dog flat-out for the rest of the day. That kind of exhaustion is cortisol burnout — their nervous system was on high alert the whole time, and now it's crashed.

04

They flinch at specific areas — paws, ears, face, sanitary

Trigger zones often come from one bad experience. A dog who was clipped too close once might guard their paws forever. This is one of the easiest things to desensitize at home — see Chapter 04.

05

They've started acting "off" between appointments

The sneakiest sign. Sometimes anxiety shows up as new behaviors at home — clinginess, sleep disruption, eating less. If these started after a particular grooming experience, that's a clue.

A note on *senior dogs*

Older dogs experience grooming anxiety differently — and the things that calm a young dog don't always work for them.

If your dog is over 8, or if you adopted a senior, this chapter is for you. Senior dogs have specific concerns most general advice ignores: arthritis makes standing on a table for an hour painful; cognitive decline makes new environments more disorienting; and a lifetime of grooming experiences — good and bad — sits in their memory.

What's different about senior anxiety

It can look like aggression, but isn't. A senior dog who's never been reactive may snap during grooming. Almost always, this is pain or fear — not behavior. They're communicating "this hurts" or "this scares me" the only way they have left.

It builds faster. Where a young dog might tolerate a stressful environment for two hours, a senior may have a 20-minute window before exhaustion kicks in. Time matters more.

Familiar faces matter more. Cognitive decline makes new groomers genuinely confusing. The same groomer every visit isn't a luxury for seniors — it's a comfort that can change whether they tolerate the appointment at all.

What helps

Shorter, more frequent appointments. Instead of a single 2-hour groom every 6 weeks, try 30-minute touch-ups every 2–3 weeks. Less time on the table, more consistent maintenance.

Mobile groomers, ideally. No car ride, no salon, no waiting. Senior dogs especially benefit from grooming happening at home, on their schedule, with the same person every time.

A small thing that makes a big difference

Bring a familiar blanket or towel from home for your senior to lie on during grooming. The scent reduces stress more than most people expect.

The 7-day *calming plan*

Seven short exercises, one per day, about 10 minutes each. The goal: rewire your dog's association with grooming from "scary" to "treat-time."

How to use it: Pick a low-stress time of day. Have high-value treats ready (small cheese cubes work better than dry biscuits). Go slow. If your dog tenses up at any point, back up one step and stay there longer.

DAY 01 Brush & Reward

Action: 60 seconds of gentle brushing in their favorite spot (usually back of the neck or under the chin). Treat every 10 seconds. Stop while they still want more.

Why: Builds the simplest possible positive association — "thing approaching me equals snack."

DAY 02 Water Sounds

Action: Sit near a running bathtub or sink with your dog. Don't bathe them — just be there. Treat for calm behavior. 5 minutes max.

Why: Desensitizes the sound of running water without the stress of an actual bath. Most dogs are reactive to the cue, not the water.

DAY 03 Tool Introduction

Action: Lay out the grooming tools (clippers off, brush, nail trimmer) on the floor near your dog. Let them sniff. Treat for approach. Don't touch them with anything.

Why: Removes the "surprise" element. By the time you actually pick up a brush next week, the tools are familiar objects instead of threats.

If you skip a day

Don't restart — pick up where you left off. The point isn't speed; it's consistency. A two-week version of this plan works just as well as a one-week version.

Days 4 through 7

By day four, you're moving from passive exposure to active practice.

DAY 04

Touch the Trigger Zones

Action: Briefly handle the areas your dog flinches at — paws, ears, face, sanitary. One touch, one treat. Don't groom anything yet. Just touch and reward.

Why: Decouples the touch itself from the grooming. They learn "paw being held = good thing happens" without any clippers in sight.

DAY 05

Reward Routine

Action: Practice a calm command (sit, down, stay) and treat. Then introduce one grooming tool — turn on the clippers near them, don't clip anything. Treat. Turn off.

Why: Pairs the calm command with the sound of a tool. Next time they hear clippers, they have a behavior to fall back on.

DAY 06

Dress Rehearsal

Action: Do a full mock grooming — brush their coat, run clippers (off) along their body, gently lift paws and hold for 3 seconds. Treat throughout. No actual cutting or bathing.

Why: All the motions, none of the stress. By the time the real groomer does this, your dog has done it a dozen times in low-stakes practice.

DAY 07

Real Practice

Action: Pick one real grooming task — a partial brush-out, a single nail trim, a face wipe. Do just that one thing. End on a win. Treat heavily.

Why: Closes the loop. They've now had a real grooming experience that ended positively. That's the memory they'll bring to the next appointment.

Most dogs aren't anxious about grooming. They're anxious about the place it happens — and the surprises that come with it.

The pre-appointment *routine*.

The night before

A long walk. Tire them out physically, not just mentally. A well-exercised dog handles novel situations better. 60–90 minutes of moderate activity in the late afternoon or evening.

Skip the late-night snacks. Some dogs experience nausea when stressed. A lighter dinner reduces the risk of an upset stomach during grooming.

Don't make it a big deal. Resist the urge to give a "tomorrow's grooming day!" pep talk. Dogs read your energy. The calmer you are, the calmer they'll be.

The morning of

Light breakfast, normal time. Half their usual portion, at the usual hour. Hungry dogs are more reactive — fed too much makes them sluggish or queasy. Half is the sweet spot.

A short walk before the appointment. Twenty minutes is enough. The point is to take the edge off, let them potty, and arrive settled.

Bring the comfort item. Their favorite blanket, a worn t-shirt of yours, or a special chew toy. Especially important the first time with a new groomer.

During the appointment

Tell your groomer everything. Sensitivities, recent vet visits, any medications, things that have spooked them before. A good groomer wants this information.

If it's mobile: stay nearby but out of sight. Some dogs do better knowing you're around; others get more anxious if they can see you. Ask the groomer what's working after the first few minutes.

12 questions to ask *any* groomer.

Whether you're considering Fur Sure or a salon down the street, these are the questions a good groomer will be happy to answer.

01 Are you licensed and insured?

In Colorado, PACFA licensing is required. Ask for the license number.

02 How long have you been grooming, and what's your training?

Experience matters. Self-taught isn't a dealbreaker — but rushed certification programs are a yellow flag.

03 Will my dog be in a cage between bath, dry, and cut?

For anxious dogs, "yes" should be your cue to keep looking.

04 How many dogs will be in the building during my appointment?

If the answer is 6+, expect a longer, more stressful experience.

05 Will the same person handle my dog the entire time?

Hand-offs between groomers add stress. One groomer per dog is better.

06 How do you handle dogs that are anxious or reactive?

Listen for the word "patience." If they mention restraints or muzzles first, that's a flag.

07 What kind of dryer do you use?

Hand-drying or low-heat is gentler. Some salons use kennel-dryers, which can add stress.

08 What products do you use, and can you accommodate allergies?

A good groomer offers hypoallergenic options without hesitation.

09 How long will the appointment take?

Mobile or one-on-one: 60–120 minutes. Drop-off salon: 3–6 hours.

10 Will you text me a quote before the appointment?

Transparent pricing prevents surprise fees. "We'll figure it out when you arrive" is not transparent.

11 What's your policy if my dog can't tolerate the appointment?

A good groomer will stop and reschedule. A bad one will push through.

12 Can I see photos of your work — especially on breeds like mine?

Skill on doodles doesn't translate to skill on shepherds. Look for breed-specific work.

When to call a pro *vs.* *try at home.*

There's a place for at-home grooming, and there's a place for a professional. Knowing the difference saves you stress — and saves your dog from a bad haircut.

Try at home

- ✓ Routine brushing between appointments
- ✓ Wiping down muddy paws after walks
- ✓ A quick face or sanitary wipe
- ✓ Touching up overgrown nails (if you're confident)
- ✓ Ear cleaning with a vet-recommended solution
- ✓ Bathing a calm dog you know how to handle
- ✓ Removing minor tangles before they mat

Call a pro

- Full body haircuts and breed-specific styling
- Heavy deshedding (huskies, shepherds, retrievers)
- Severe matting that needs careful removal
- Any anxious, reactive, or geriatric dog
- Sanitary trims and eye-area work
- Nail trims if your dog has black nails or you're unsure
- Anal gland expression (almost always)

⚠ DON'T DIY THESE — GO TO A VET OR PRO

Severe matting close to the skin (cutting blindly into a mat can slice skin underneath). **Suspected hot spots or skin infections** (groom around them, don't treat them). **Bleeding nail beds** (apply pressure, call a vet if it doesn't stop). **Eye-area work on a dog who won't hold still** — one wrong move and you're at the emergency vet.

The goal isn't to do everything yourself — it's to do the right things yourself, and trust a pro with the rest.

A NOTE FROM FUR SURE

Thanks for letting us be part of your dog's story.

If you've made it this far, you're already the kind of dog parent who pays attention. Your pup is lucky to have you.

Most of what's in this guide you can use no matter who grooms your dog. We hope you do. And if you're ever in the North Denver Metro and want to try a calmer, cage-free, one-on-one approach — we'd love to meet your dog.

No pressure, no upsell. Just give us a call, or book online when you're ready.

BOOK A CALM GROOMING SESSION →

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Founded by Jacob, Angelique & Mila

Family-owned. Fur Sure.