

## Behavior Tips: *House Training*

Housetraining is one of the most necessary lessons to teach whether you have a new puppy or a grown dog. Elimination in unwanted places is a major reason for pet relinquishment. Housetraining is easier if rules are established when a puppy first comes into the home. However, even with the best efforts, accidents may happen. These incidents are not purposeful rather they are usually due to either a lack of supervision or the pet having to wait longer than it can actually go.

Patience and consistency are essential. Make sure the puppy has completed urinating and defecating before bringing it back inside. Some puppies will urinate or defecate more than once in order to fully empty their bladder and bowels. Often we return the puppy to the indoors before the puppy has completely eliminated especially during unpleasant weather when neither the owner nor the puppy wants to stay outside.

Housetraining should begin as soon as the puppy arrives in its new home. Puppies may be most receptive to the process between 8–12 weeks of age when they are capable of learning short lessons. Most young dogs tend to use the same area each time they eliminate; therefore, it is beneficial to take the puppy or dog to a consistent spot every time it is taken outside.

If you are having difficulty housetraining your puppy, please be sure the puppy has been thoroughly examined by a veterinarian. Health problems can interfere with the housetraining process.

### Here are 5 keys to success:

#### 1) Numerous Trips Outside

There are four times a puppy typically eliminates.

- Soon after waking up** – after a nap and when first waking in the morning. Puppies sleep several times a day, thus have several waking periods.
- After eating**--the gastrocolic response produces a bowel movement. With three or four feedings each day, young puppies require a considerable number of trips outside.
- Intense activity** (e.g. playing or exercising) stimulates elimination.
- Bedtime** --dogs normally eliminate before bedding down at night.

**Take the puppy out frequently.** Give a consistent simple cue word or phrase (i.e. “Go potty”) and praise the puppy and/or give a food reward for eliminating in the correct area.

Schedules and regular routines for rest, eating, and play regulate the elimination process. In households where the puppy is left alone for 8 to 10 hours at a time, a dog walker should be hired to allow the puppy outside to eliminate.

Occasional accidents may happen; a puppy cannot hold its bladder for long periods of time. In general, puppies can be expected to hold their bladder for one hour for each month of age plus one. For example, an 8-week-old puppy should be taken outside at least every 3 hours during the day. Even adult housetrained dogs need to be taken outside a minimum of 5 times per day.

**Never punish the puppy for eliminating in the wrong area!** Punishments such as rubbing the puppy’s nose in the urine or feces or spanking it after an accident has occurred do absolutely nothing to teach the puppy what it should do. If anything, this

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will delay housetraining because the puppy will be afraid to eliminate in front of the owner even outside.

#### 2) 100% Supervision When Not Confined

If a puppy eliminates in the house, it learns that it is acceptable to do so. Early in the learning process, the puppy may assume any place can be used to eliminate. To prevent this behavior from occurring, the owner must watch the puppy every second if it is out of its crate or confinement area.

#### 3) Confinement During Unsupervised Times

If the puppy is to be left alone or if you are unable to supervise it – even for a just a few minutes, the puppy should be confined in a small area such as a bathroom, utility room, or a small crate/pen. A space this size is large enough for a water bowl and clearly defined bedding area yet limits the amount of space for accidents to happen. Dogs generally avoid soiling their bed area, making them inclined to retain urine and feces until they can access an acceptable location for eliminating. However, puppies raised exclusively in cages, kennels or other close confinement areas may learn to preferentially eliminate in their cage area rather than elsewhere.

Puppies given the run of the house without supervision or access to a dog door may not learn to hold their bowels and bladder or signal when they need to eliminate because elimination areas are readily available. If a puppy must be left for long periods of time without a dog walker, it should be confined to a pen or room with access to its kennel. The puppy will be forced to eliminate on the floor or potty pads but can retain the desire to keep its bed area (the crate) clean.

Dogs often learn to prefer one surface for elimination, possibly to the exclusion of all others. This preference occurs around 8 weeks of age. Newspaper, grass, concrete, or asphalt commonly becomes the chosen surface at the prompting of the owner. Dogs that will be expected to eliminate outdoors as adults should learn such as puppies. Do not start the puppy on puppy pads and then expect it to adjust to something different later. Similarly, when dogs raised outside are allowed into the house, carpet often serves as the surface most closely resembling grass.

#### 4) Interruption during unwanted Elimination

Accidents may happen during the housetraining regimen. If the puppy begins to urinate or defecate in an inappropriate area, a simple distracting noise may serve to interrupt the action. Immediately take the puppy to the correct area to finish and praise it for eliminating in the acceptable location.

#### 5) Positive Reinforcement for Correct Behavior

Rewards are strong motivators to reinforce the learning process. Quiet praise is best given while the dog is eliminating. The puppy can then be given a food treat immediately as it finishes. Giving the puppy a treat after it returns to the house will reinforce the puppy for coming back into the house, not for eliminating. In order to consistently reinforce the puppy for eliminating in the correct area outside, someone must go out with the puppy every time during the learning process.

Housetraining need not be a painful, stressful experience for owners or their puppies. Patience, supervision, and positive rewards are the keys to a happy, housetrained puppy or dog.