

Housetraining Protocols

No one looks forward to housetraining their dog. Let's face it; housetraining can be frustrating, messy and worst case – expensive if home decorating can't be cleaned easily. But with some patience and understanding, this important step in dog ownership can be successful without being too much of a nightmare.

How long it will take to houstrain your dog will depend on the dog. Different dogs have different capabilities and learning curves. Don't fall into the misconception of thinking your dog is making a mess to get even with you for some relationship infraction or trying to ruin your house on purpose. Dogs are smart, but complex emotions such as vengefulness and spite are reserved for human kind and have no scientific basis in the canine world.

Often it takes puppies awhile to gain the muscle control to hold it in. Some dogs have bladders that grow and mature at a slower rate than others. Even the sphincter muscles need time to mature. It is not uncommon for a dog to be 6 months old before having good control. Some can take even longer. And depending on previous life experiences, some older dogs may have no concept of the difference between inside and out. The secret to housetraining is consistency and repetition. Remember, with the exception of rare medical conditions, all dogs can be housetrained.

Here are some basic principles to follow:

- Probably the most important rule to remember is positive reinforcement. **<Click> your dog as he finishes eliminating and then back it up with food and/or love upon completion.** Every time your dog eliminates outside, lavish him with praise and treats. This means you have to go out with your dog every time!
- **Take your dog outside after naps, meals, play sessions and then every half hour in-between.** Even if the dog in question is mature. Older dogs may be able to hold their urine, but won't know how long to hold it or where the proper place to release is.
- **Your dog should never be left to roam inside unsupervised.** If you can't watch the dog, it's your job to assign the task to another adult. Children under 16 cannot be relied upon for this. If no one is available to give it their full attention, then your dog needs to be confined.
- **Get your dog on a regular feeding schedule,** so you can start predicting his bodily functions' schedule.

- **Learn to recognize your dog's signals that they need to go out.** For example: many dogs will sniff the floor and walk in circles when they need to go. Or a dog that has been previously punished may suddenly leave the room in an effort to find a private potty spot away from humans.
- **Slowly increase the time in-between toilet breaks.** But only do this after you are confident that you have learned your dog's signals.
- Punishing is unproductive. It will hinder the training process. **Never startle or punish your dog as the event is taking place.** You may find this is contrary to many "old school" training guides. But if startled or punished, dogs will quickly learn to fear eliminating in the presence of a human. This will give you fewer opportunities to reward the right behavior. You may also find "presents" in out of the way areas of your house as your dog seeks to relieve themselves privately.
- **Punishing after the fact is pointless.** The chance of your dog making the connection between the punishment and the act, have the same odds as winning the lottery. You will only succeed in damaging your relationship as your dog begins to think you are unpredictable and not trustworthy.
- **In the event of an accident, don't interpret cowering or appeasing behaviors as "He knows he did something wrong".** The only thing your dog knows is that you are upset. He is reading your expression and body language, and is just trying to calm you down.
- **You can teach your dog a signal to make it easier for you to recognize a request for the outside toilet.** This is after you are well on your way to being housetrained. You could teach your dog to ring a bell at the door or bark. Although you should use caution when teaching a dog to "speak". Dogs don't generalize behaviors easily, but when they do; look out! You may create a situation where your dog tries barking for all of his requests.

What to do when there is a lapse in progress and you have an accident:

- **First thing is to remain calm** (even if you want to scream on the inside). Undue drama will not help the situation. Take this opportunity to understand a valuable lesson. In your case: you need to concentrate more intently on your housetraining.
- **Clean the area thoroughly.** There are several products on the market to use. Ask your vet or a cleaning professional for a recommendation.

- **Analyze the situation prior to the accident.** Did some one forget their responsibilities? Did you go too fast with increasing a time between toilet breaks? Did you miss a signal? Make changes accordingly.
- **If you truly can't understand the deterioration in progress, you may need to consider some other possible causes.**
 - **Could there be a health issue involved?** Urinary tract infection, spay incontinence, bladder cysts and tumors, kidney disease and diabetes are a few to consider with your veterinarian.
 - **Is it a case of your dog not taking the opportunity to eliminate outside and then soon after has an accident indoors?** Do you end the walk or play session as soon as he urinates or defecates? It may be that your dog has figured out that as soon as he goes potty, all the fun ends. Try taking your dog out on leash without playing or going for a walk. Be very neutral until after he has eliminated. Then let the party begin! Play, take a walk or just hang out if, that was what your dog was trying to prolong.
 - **Could your dog be afraid to go outside?** You could try making it loads of fun to be outside with treats and games. If the fear doesn't easily subside, please contact us for specific suggestions.
 - **Is the weather a deterrent?** Cold weather can be hard on some dogs. Consider getting a doggy sweater; just make sure it is a comfortable fit. Think more about function than fashion. If rain is an issue, invest in a large umbrella and be persistent. You may consider paper training your dog to a spot in the garage during bad weather.
 - **Submissive or fear urination?** This will usually happen when greeting some one or during a fearful moment. Contact us for specific suggestions on helping with this.
 - **Separation anxiety?** Housetraining issues will only be a problem when the dog is left alone. Crate soiling is an indicator that the anxiety is too overwhelming for your dog to handle. This can be a difficult issue to troubleshoot. Contact us for separation anxiety protocols.
 - **Territorial marking?** This most commonly happens with males, but is not unheard of in females. Sexually altered dogs do this as well as intact animals. Most likely you will see that the dog is leaving dibles on vertical surfaces; wall corners, table legs, shelving, etc. Females may not completely lift their leg, so you will find the urine at the edge of walls or furniture. This usually occurs with a change; new to a home, new dog or person in home, moving to a new house, change in schedule, etc. This is not an indicator of a dominance problem. Omega dogs in a pack will mark as much as the alphas. Again, this can be difficult to troubleshoot. It would be best to contact us for some suggestions.