

Housetraining is usually the first priority for owners of new puppies. While some puppies seem to "housetrain themselves" in a matter of days, others struggle with accidents through canine adolescence and sometimes on into adulthood. Puppies who fail potty training often turn up in shelters when their owners can no longer believe their pet will "grow out of" inappropriate elimination. Sadly, the major cause of housetraining breakdown is the caring pet owner, who dedicates time, effort, and escalating emotion while applying incorrect training methods. Pet owners can protect their homes, the permanence of their pets in those homes, and their own peace of mind when they approach puppy potty training challenges logically and patiently.

Why do dogs repeat certain behaviors despite their owners' sometimes blatant attempts at letting them know they disapprove? Because, regardless of how unpleasant the behavior may be to the humans, it is purposeful and has a positive result for the dog. Elimination provides the dog with positive reinforcement in the form of relief, wherever it occurs. Peeing privately on the off-limits living room's white carpet, the un-potty-trained puppy feels better. There is no concern for cost of cleaning, or care about permanent discoloration; just good feelings in the form of an emptied bladder.

When a puppy eliminates in a room it rarely accesses, or at a point which is far away from its sleeping/ playing/ eating areas, the puppy is actually showing an early stage of "housetraining". The instinct not to soil the cave, passed forward from long-ago wolf ancestors, is present and helping to motivate house training even in the smallest, fluffiest, least wolf-y domestic dog. The hard part is getting that small animal, which in nature would have a snug cave as inhabited space, to view the entire interior of even a modest sized human home as all "cave," and none as "outside." Acres of vacant Oriental rug in a remote dining room; spare bedrooms devoid of the scents that claim a space as inhabited; far-away basements; all call out to dogs as excellent places to leave a discreet deposit. Puppies purchased from pet stores often have been confined in small cages in close proximity to their own eliminations and can be very difficult to housetrain. Their instinctive drive to keep clean and healthy, by eliminating away from their sleeping area, has been overridden. Out of forced necessity they eliminated in their beds and then lay in or upon their waste, as a result becoming comfortable with or oblivious to its presence.

Puppies that have accidents are not bad, and they do not know so-called right from wrong. Punishment, anger, and disapproval have no place in any aspect of training. When owners lose their cool

during housetraining efforts they can cause irreversible damage both to the dog's housetraining and its trust of human beings. When accidents do happen, wise pet owners grit their teeth, hold their noses, and clean them up. No puppy has ever been housetrained without an accident or...several. Watching for signs that a puppy may need to eliminate, such as sniffing the floor, circling, or suddenly running out of sight, helps prevent accidents.

Depending on the puppy's age, health, physical development, history, feeding schedule, and access to water, it will have varying potential for bladder and bowel control. An owner's adherence to reinforcing appropriate elimination behavior, while preventing accidents, is critical to success. Best potty training odds are created by maintaining highly predictable, healthy schedules which are usually provided by either the puppy's breeder or veterinarian. Providing positive alternatives to inappropriate elimination, while preventing accidents, changes pet potty training behavior for the better.

Owners with the greatest potty training success tell their pets when it is time to go out, rather than waiting for "signals." Signaling dogs may not develop a strong ability to wait and hold eliminations, and may have accidents when owners are not available to tend to immediate needs. Another negative repercussion of signals is the potential for developing a dog that "cries wolf"--or more accurately, cries "outside." False alarmists, also known as owner-training dogs, are taught a sure fire way of yanking their owners' chains by none other than--their owners! Bell-ringing, signaling dogs often have owners who jump through hoops like Pavlov's people. The better approach -- adhering to consistent time schedules with regards to both feeding and trips outside, helps dogs learn to wait and helps create predictable biological elimination patterns.

Another unexpected training error that can contribute to potty training breakdown is rewarding outdoor successes with food. Reinforcing outside eliminations with treats may upset a puppy's delicate digestive balance, causing the need to eliminate off-schedule. What goes in must come out; and twelve small snacks per day, plus meals, equal a lot coming out. Better reinforcers for puppy potty success are praise, play, or going for walks AFTER eliminating in a designated potty spot. When puppies learn successful potty trips sequentially provide passage to all sorts of adventures, they begin to hurry to complete the task.

Right after a puppy successfully eliminates in the designated outdoor potty area is also the best

time to allow supervised access to otherwise off-limits areas inside the home. Since the puppy has just eliminated in the appropriate area, accidents are unlikely. Bringing the EMPTY dog into each room of the house introduces indoor areas as inhabited, rather than toilet, territory. A young puppy's free indoor activities should be kept short; after about twenty minutes the puppy should be either tethered to an available person, or confined. Tethering introduces the dog to family participation and to the beginner-dog version of the "run-of-the-house" with the helpful, limiting, control of the leash as an accident inhibiting lifeline.

During pet owner absences, confinement is important in order to prevent off-schedule accidents. Puppies can be confined in a large dog cage, also known as a crate, or restrained in a tile floored, puppy-proofed room such as a gated-off kitchen or laundry room. Puppies should not be left alone or confined for more two hours up to four months of age; three hours up to six months of age; and six hours is the maximum for dogs of any age. Pet sitting services and dog day care facilities are options for pet owners who work long hours and need help breaking up their pet's long home-alone days.

When it comes to puppy potty training, patience is critical. The three most important concepts are schedule, supervision, and success. Housetraining a dog is a matter of taking advantage of canine instincts to keep inhabited spaces clean. Owners who help their dogs achieve success and security, while teaching appropriate locations for relief and preventing inappropriate habits from developing, are housetraining their dogs. Success may come more slowly for some, but when people stick with the program it happens--without harm to the dog, the home, or the relationship!