

Housebreaking Hints

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Plan Your Approach

Take advantage of your dog's "den instinct" to curl up in a snug, protected space as the first step to successful housebreaking. Since most puppies or adult dogs will not soil their sleeping quarters, a crate or kennel—when properly introduced as a happy and rewarding place---provides your pet with a safe and secure haven of its very own.

The crate should be just big enough for the pup to stand up, turn around, and lie down. The most common mistake is using a crate that is too big, which gives the pup room to "make a mess" and get away from it. A crate big enough to accommodate an adult dog can be partitioned off, increasing available sleeping room as the puppy grows. You can use either a plastic airline crate (which is easy to clean) or a wire crate (generally more effective when covered with a light blanket to create a cozy nest).

Bedding in the crate is optional. If the pup doesn't chew fabric and doesn't soil bedding, a towel is fine. We discourage the use of a newspaper in the crate because it may send the wrong message of "go here", especially if the pup was previously paper-trained.

Although it is unfair to crate puppies or adult dogs for hours on end, Drs. Foster and Smith state in *Canine News* that puppies can usually "hold it" through the night when they are 8-10 weeks old. However, you should not expect your pup to wait more than 4-5 hours (less for very young pups) between outings during the day. If this is necessary, a safe "exercise area" is a good alternative until the pup is 6-8 months old and physically able to "hold it" all day.

This exercise area could be a commercially available exercise pen set up in the garage with his crate (door open) at one end and newspaper or wee-wee pads at the other. Although you can use a laundry room or bathroom, the pup may decide that moldings, cabinets, floors, doors and even walls are the perfect puppy chew toy! You can spray the likely-to-be-chewed areas with Bitter Apple or another repellent or you can set up the exercise pen in the room. However keep in mind that every time your pup eliminates on newspapers or wee-wee pads, she is learning that is where she should "go". If ultimately she is supposed to eliminate outside, you will have to train her again to go on grass or gravel (a piece of previously soiled paper placed outside may help her get the idea). Usually it is easiest to skip the step of "paper training" and go directly to the outdoors.

A fair-weather alternative is an outdoor chain link kennel-run, equipped with an insulated doghouse (plastic is not as tasty to chew on as wood), a water supply, and a tarp cover if shade is not constantly available. Patio blocks make easy-to-clean dig-proof flooring for a kennel run. And of course, wherever your dog stays in your absence, you should provide safe chew toys for entertainment.

Getting Started

Use the crate whenever the pup is not actively under your supervision, including bedtime, when you leave the house, when household responsibilities prevent you from keeping a close eye on her, when you shower or go to the mailbox, or during meals. This keeps the pup safe and out of trouble, decreases or prevents inside potty mistakes, and saves you a lot of work and frustration.

When you take the puppy out of her crate, IMMEDIATELY take her outside to her approved potty area. Carry her if she's pokey, so she doesn't have the chance to have an accident. Do this every single time, both first thing in the morning and during the day, even if she was only in the crate for 15 minutes.

Once outside, say "Go Potty" (or whatever your go-potty phrase will be). As soon as the pup starts to go, repeat your phrase in a quiet undertone (an excited loud voice may make her stop!) while she is going. Just as pup finishes, say "good girl, good potty" with a warm and happy voice. Use your same phrase every time, and after a few weeks your pup will go as soon as she hears the go-potty phrase.

Consistency

Housebreaking progress is strongly influenced by a consistent approach. Try to be consistent with feeding times, go-potty phrases and places, exercise, outdoor access after having been crated and even with which door you use to go outside. ALWAYS take your pup outside whenever she starts doing something she wasn't doing before—even if she was just out—including when she wakes up, eats, drinks or stop playing. Watch for "potty signals" such as sniffing, sudden wandering away, circling, whining or going towards the door and take her out immediately.

Always provide fresh, clean water. Remember that a puppy will usually eliminate within a few minutes after eating or drinking and again about 20-30 minutes later. Also, keep in mind that dogs urinate more frequently than they poop! Feed the evening meal early enough to allow pup to eliminate completely, and give her a quiet time before bed so she does not drink a lot of water before going out last thing at night. It is acceptable to take up the water in early evening, as long as you remember to give water as soon as the pup is up and about the next morning.

Be consistent in crating your puppy at bedtime. Use a word or phrase, such as "in your kennel" every time you put the puppy in her crate, followed by a treat after she goes in, and soon she will readily enter on command.

Although it takes a lot of time and energy, steady progress resulting in successful housebreaking depends on YOU. The fewer accidents she has inside (which are really opportunities to learn a bad habit), the faster she learns what she is supposed to do—and where!



To Correct or Not to Correct?

So the puppy will not know how much attention is gained when an accident happens, put her out of sight while you clean up. With a rag or paper towel, clean up the feces and/or soak up all the urine and clean the spot with a good carpet cleaner. Then clean again with an enzyme cleaner specifically formulated to neutralize pet waste and odor. Next, spray the spot with dog repellent to discourage future visits. Never “punish” for crate accidents.

Keeping your dog on a 6 foot leash, attached to your waistline (run it through a belt-loop), even while in the house, until she is totally reliable out of the crate, will insure that you won't miss any signs that she needs to “go”. This method is called “tethering”. If you allow your puppy or dog free roam of the house, she may become virtually impossible to housebreak. You may even miss urine accidents of small dogs, never even realizing there are spots in your carpet that are now sending “go here” signals. Verbal or physical corrections “after the fact” are useless and only serve to confuse the dog. A quick “no” and grabbing the pup while in the act and taking it immediately outside can help get the message across, but dogs that are corrected after the fact will become confused and may even become afraid to go in your presence when you take them outside.

Helpful Hints

Some puppies go outside and piddle, then start playing and seem to forget to poop until they come back inside! If this is a persistent problem, no matter how long you stay out with her, just before she goes out, insert a paper (not wooden) match halfway into her rectum. Either end of the match is fine; the sulfur end won't hurt her. Most puppies will then eliminate within 2 minutes (get her outside quickly!) If not, simply remove the match and try again a little later. They don't have hands to pull the match out, so when they try to push it out, anything else that needs to come out will come along with it.

Grown dogs are usually easier to housebreak than puppies, and the process is exactly the same—lots of supervision, teach a “go potty” word, use the crate. However, the exception is an unneutered male who may have been allowed to mark his territory in his former housing environment. Rule number one: neuter that boy! Rule two: crate him unless he is under your close supervision (preferably tethered to your waist) and be especially alert to signs that he's getting ready to lift his leg. Keeping him on leash with you, even in the house, will prevent marking, plus you can quickly give a verbal correction and walk him immediately outside as needed.

If a puppy urinates from excitement or submission, just ignore it. This is usually outgrown as long as you don't unwittingly reinforce or worsen the behavior by yelling at the dog (if they are being submissive, scolding the dog will actually make the behavior occur more often). If it does not lessen by the time the dog is 6 months old, behavior modification programs (where the pup's confidence and trust in you is increased) and/or medication may help solve the problem.

Try to include potty breaks as a part of your fun times outside together, but be sure there is still time for playing or a quick walk after potty is done. If the joy of being with you outside—whether in a fenced yard or on a leash walk—always ends as soon as the pup performs, then she may eventually take forever to go (or not go at all) to prolong the fun.

If you need additional help, please feel free to contact us at knowingdogs@hotmail.com