

Housebreaking Hints

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The holidays are over and many people have a new puppy or adult dog. Housebreaking is on new dog owners' minds. Two basic principles, consistency and timing, are important to achieving success. Everyone working with the pup must be consistent in the language they use, in following through with commands, and in using praise and corrections at the right time.

Feed the dog at regular intervals. How many times per day you feed the pup will depend on his age. A young puppy has very little bladder control until about four months old. But he gets more control with time and, by about six months of age, should be able to "hold it" for about six or so hours. Up until about five or six months old, a puppy usually eats three meals per day. Two meals per day can then be continued for the rest of the dog's life. Feed him only at mealtimes. Don't leave food down and self-feed, or you won't be able to estimate when he'll have to potty. Also, dogs who have food left down all of the time can become picky eaters as well as overweight.

The pup will have to potty within about 15 minutes after eating, as well as immediately after playing, sleeping, and chewing. Take him out also after he drinks water. Things get easier as the pup has more bladder and bowel control. A reliable dog walker can help if you're gone too many hours.

When the pup is first learning, take him out the same route, out the same door, to his potty area. Taking him out this route consistently also may have an unexpected bonus that he'll learn to go to that door on his own to show you that he needs to potty. Until the puppy is fully covered by his vaccinations, the potty area should be one that's not used by strange dogs. Don't play with him at this time. He's there for serious work only: to potty. Use a command, such as "go potty" or "hurry." Positive reinforcement is very important in dog training. Happily praise profusely immediately after he finishes going. You can even reward with a very small treat. But remember: too many treats will interrupt his housebreaking schedule.

It's important to observe the puppy and not give him too much freedom too soon. If the pup is allowed to wander off unobserved into other rooms, he may have accidents there, as he may not believe that they are part of his "den." Only if you catch him having an accident, interrupt him by saying "stop" or "eh-eh" or something similar. Then, take him to his potty area and praise immediately after he finishes going. Depending on his size, you can carry him there or walk him immediately on lead there. Timing of the verbal correction is important: don't correct him if you don't see him having the accident. He'll understand what you mean only if you correct during the accident or immediately afterward. Even a

few minutes later is too late, because the pup will think that you are correcting him for what he is doing at the time. An odor neutralizer made for the purpose of cleaning up doggy accidents must be used. If the pup has already had accidents in unknown areas, you can purchase a black light at a pet store to reveal the areas that need to be deodorized. These are available at pet stores.

Puppies usually give cues regarding when they need to go to the bathroom. Heed them. Some pups sniff the floor, whereas others get agitated, spin, or whine. Some learn to go to the door on their own. When you learn his signals, you can take him to his bathroom area before he has to eliminate.

It's important to use some sort of safe confinement for your pup when you can't observe him. If a pup is given too much freedom too soon, he'll have accidents you don't see and will be drawn back to those areas. A crate is usually best as long as it's not overused and if it's introduced properly. Dogs are den animals and he'll learn to love his crate if he's given a sufficient amount of exercise, training, and attention from you. The crate can be wire or a plastic kennel and should be just big enough for the pup to stand up, lie down, and turn around in comfortably. You can buy wire crates with a divider that can be moved to accommodate the adult dog.

Start by introducing the crate when the puppy is tired and right after he has pottied. You can use a treat as a lure to enter, then as a reward. Praise immediately after he has entered the crate. At first, keep the crate door open. Then, as he progresses, close the crate door for a short period of time, letting him out only when he's quiet. Make the crate an inviting place with a special safe toy, such as a Kong or Nylabone. Make sure that the pup has pottied before he's put into his crate, so that he won't be forced to have an unavoidable accident. Place the crate in the main family area of the house and in the bedroom, so that the pup's near you and not banished to an unused part of the house.

It's important that you don't just place the pup in a yard and assume that he went to the bathroom. He may not have pottied--but will when he comes in. Some people use an intermediate step of first taking the pup to paper inside until he's fully vaccinated, then use the great outdoors after he's fully protected. However, starting with the outside at the beginning is often easier, as you're not teaching him that it's acceptable to potty inside, which can be confusing to a pup.

However, if you have a very small dog and want him to go to the bathroom inside the house in one location, you can do so. People in high-rise apartments or who don't otherwise have quick access to the outside often want this option. You can buy a plastic tray such as the ones that slide in wire crates and put puppy housebreaking pads or newspaper there. Just as you would outside, take him to this potty station with the same routine. This "paper training" is often harder to teach than is housebreaking, because the pup is taught that it's acceptable to go

to the bathroom in the house—he just has to learn where is acceptable. But, if you're consistent, it can be done.

You can also housebreak an adult dog by using the above rules. With an adult dog, you might have to overcome past bad habits or just give a refresher course, but he will also have better bladder control than a young puppy has. You can teach an old dog new tricks! One last word of advice: if your dog or puppy is not housebroken and you've been consistent in your training, please take him to the veterinarian. He may have a urinary tract infection or other physical problem. Happy housebreaking! .