

House Training Your Puppy

Dogs can be trained not to eliminate in the house because they naturally develop preferences for eliminating in certain places or on certain surfaces like grass. Dogs will not typically eliminate where they sleep, eat and spend most of their time. This tendency is very useful in house training dogs. When we house train our dogs, we make use of this ability to learn when and where to eliminate. If we don't actively teach them where to eliminate, they will develop their own preferences, such as the living room rug, which may be very undesirable to owners. With young puppies, we teach them to prefer to eliminate in places that are acceptable to us. Preference learning is like most other learning, we want to reinforce acceptable behavior, and minimize the opportunities for unacceptable behavior. Punishing unacceptable behavior does not work well in house training dogs.

It is important to recognize the physical limits of puppies when we house train them. Young puppies may physically need to eliminate every 2 - 4 hours during the daylight hours when they are most active. They may be able to control themselves longer overnight. Adult dogs may be able to hold their waste for 6 to 8 hours during the day and usually can hold it 8 to 10 hours overnight. These are averages and individual dogs may be able to control their need to eliminate for longer or shorter periods than this. You should learn the physical limits of your dog and not exceed them. It is not fair to expect your dog to hold her elimination longer than she is physically able.

House training takes time and a commitment from the family to do it right. Puppies don't just train themselves, although some are easier to train than others. Everyone in the household must be willing to help with the training -- taking the pup out at all hours, supervising the pup so accidents don't happen, and cleaning up when they do. It may take several weeks to several months for a puppy to become reliably house trained. If you are patient and consistent in following the rules suggested below, you should be very successful in house training your puppy with a minimum of distress to you or to her.

Rules for house training Puppies

- **Try to be consistent in your routines with your puppy.** Young animals, like young children, do best when they have an established routine for feeding, play, naps and elimination. Most mammals need to eliminate within 1 hour after eating. Scheduling regular meals can make it easier for you to guess when the pup needs to eliminate and then you can take her to the appropriate spot for elimination.
- **Reward good behavior.** Take the puppy to the place where you want her to eliminate at times when she is most likely to need to go -- first thing in the morning after waking up, last thing at night before going to bed, after each meal, after naps longer than two hours or after play periods of more than 20 minutes. When taking the puppy out, you should ask "Do you want to go potty?" or "Do you want to go outside?" or some other phrase to try to get her excited to go out. When taking her to the spot where she should eliminate, you should stand with her and tell her "Do your business" or "Go potty". When she eliminates, praise her lavishly but quietly and give her a tasty tidbit. It is very important that you reward her for going in the appropriate place. This is how she establishes her preferences.
- **Make accidents difficult.** The best way for you to do this is to supervise the puppy constantly. Keeping her with you by leashing her to your belt or to your chair, or putting up gates or closing doors to keep her in sight. Letting her run free, unsupervised is an invitation to disaster. If she has frequent accidents in the house, she may begin to develop preferences for those locations which will make it harder for her to learn where she should eliminate. Many puppies have a natural aversion to eliminating in small areas

where they spend a lot of time such as a kennel or crate, a small area of the kitchen, laundry room or bathroom. Sometimes the puppy can be left in these areas for short periods of time *if she has been trained to the area*. This means she has been given pleasant experiences there and she is comfortable and not fearful there (see *Crate Training Your Puppy*). Many puppies can sleep in crates or these other areas overnight if the owners are willing to get up and take her to eliminate if she needs to go. If the pup must be left for very long periods of time, longer than she can be reasonably expected to hold her waste, then she should be placed in a larger area such as the kitchen, laundry room or other area where she can have a rest spot, play area, water and an elimination area. Papers or elimination pads should be put down for her to eliminate on.

- **Never punish after the fact.** Puppies will have some accidents no matter how good a job you do in training her.
 - **If she is caught in the act**, actually squatting to eliminate, don't yell at her, hit her or kick her. Use your verbal reprimand word, such as "eh", merely to interrupt the behavior (no need to shout). Then simply take her to the door, saying, in a neutral tone of voice, "Let's go outside". Take her to the appropriate place and let her finish her elimination, as you encourage her with your "Go potty" phrase. Yelling, hitting, making loud noises or other punishments don't help with house training and seem to cause fears that can actually disrupt the house training process.
 - **If she wasn't caught in the act**, don't yell, hit her or do any other punishment. The dog will not understand what she is being punished for. Even taking her over to the mess and then delivering the punishment will not help. She will not make the connection between the behavior that produced the mess (squatting and eliminating) and the punishment delivered minutes or hours later. At best the pup punished after the fact will only learn to avoid messes and become fearful of the owners. Even if you come on the mess just a few seconds after it happened, taking the dog outside will not help. Simply clean up the mess and try to supervise her more carefully.
- **Clean any soiled area with a good enzymatic cleaner.** Dogs will be attracted back to soiled areas by the smell, so it is a good idea to eliminate the odors. The most effective ways to get rid of the odors is with enzymatic cleaners. These cleaners break down the odors by a biological action of enzymes. There are many effective brands, just be sure the label says "enzymatic cleaner". Sometimes vinegar and water can help to dilute odors. Avoid cleaning agents containing ammonia. This actually smells like waste and may attract the puppy back to eliminate.
- **Gradually provide more freedom.** As the puppy has fewer accidents and goes to the appropriate place to eliminate more frequently, gradually give her more freedom around the house. This should be done gradually over a few days or weeks. There shouldn't be a sudden transition from constant supervision to no supervision. If the puppy has an accident when you are giving her more freedom, go back to more supervision for a while and then try to give her more freedom again later.