

HOUSETRAINING DOGS

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Dogs naturally avoid eliminating in their living space. However, they need to be taught what their living space is and where the appropriate place to eliminate is. Dogs can be trained to eliminate outside on grass or rocks, on a potty pad, or in a litter box. Dogs usually need to eliminate after eating meals, upon waking from sleep, after exiting the crate, first thing in the morning and after an active bout of play. Exercise, such as taking a dog for a walk, often triggers elimination. Signs that a dog needs to eliminate include sniffing, circling, arching the back and/or tail, and squatting.

Developing Realistic Expectations

Housetraining puppies and adult dogs is a matter of helping them develop a strong preference for eliminating in the appropriate place or places. Puppies under the age of 5-6 months are not physically capable of holding waste for many hours. Adult dogs that have had a major change in their life such as a move or coming from a shelter may need to be housetrained all over again. In addition, if a dog is expected to hold waste for an unreasonable amount of time, he will eliminate to relieve his discomfort. If puppies or adult dogs have frequent accidents, they are more likely to lose their housetraining or have more trouble becoming housetrained. Don't believe the myth that any dog can be housetrained in seven days or less. House training a puppy can take weeks or months even up to nine months depending upon how consistent you are in following the housetraining procedures. Housetraining adult dogs usually proceeds faster than puppies as they are physically capable of holding their waste longer. The more accidents that a dog or puppy has (that is, the longer that he has been eliminating in an inappropriate place), the longer it will take to housetrain him.

How to Housetrain Dogs

Housetraining puppies or adult dogs or retraining a dog involves the same procedures. The goal is to minimize the opportunities for accidents while maximizing elimination in the appropriate place. Be patient and consistent in your training. Your dog should be put on a regular schedule for feeding. Puppies need to eat 3-4 times per day while adults eat 1-2 times per day. Talk to your veterinarian to find out what is best for your dog. Dogs usually need to eliminate within 15 minutes of eating or drinking.

Set your dog up for success by supervising him. He should be supervised or kept in a small safe area 100 percent of the time. He can be tethered to you, to an eyehook in the wall, or to a piece of furniture or an appliance near you. Bedroom doors should be shut and access to rooms can be blocked by the use of baby gates. A crate or safe room such as a laundry room should be utilized when your dog can not be supervised. Don't use the crate or other safe area as a substitute for supervision. Locking your dog away in a crate or other small area for many hours at a time, is unfair to

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him and will interfere with the development of his normal social behavior. Take your dog to eliminate first thing after waking, last thing at night, after eating, play or naps. Encourage your dog to let you know when he needs to eliminate by saying in a happy excited voice "Fido, do you need to go potty?" and then encouraging signs such as whining, pawing at you or running to the door. Younger dogs should be taken to eliminate more often than older dogs. Watch for the signs of sniffing, circling, scratching at the floor, arching, and/or squatting and immediately take your dog to the right spot whether it is outside, on a potty pad or in a litter box. Eventually, your dog will "let you know" by going to the door, pawing or whining when it is time to go. When you take your dog to eliminate, go out with him to be sure he really eliminates. Remain calm, use a soft voice and don't pace. Use a cue word such as 'go potty' or 'go poopy' as he eliminates. Eventually, he will make an association between the word and the act. This will make elimination on demand possible. Give your dog a treat and praise him for eliminating appropriately. The treat should be something small and soft given immediately upon elimination. Treats and praise make going in front of you (versus sneaking away in the house) a good thing.

If you catch your dog starting to eliminate in the house, startle him with a noise (clap your hands, stomp on the floor) or with your voice ("No Fido! Let's go outside"). Immediately, take your dog to the desired elimination spot and treat and praise him for finishing at his spot. If you take him to his spot and he doesn't eliminate, take him back in and watch for the signs, then try again in 5-10 minutes. When your dog is reliably letting you know he has to go, you can gradually start giving him more freedom. If an accident occurs, then too much freedom was given too soon and you should back up the training a few steps. Dogs vary on how quickly they become housetrained. It can take anywhere from a few weeks up to a year. Much depends on preventing accidents from happening. Bad habits are harder to break than good habits are to make.

You may need the help of a trainer or behavior consultant to help you work with the problem. Talk to your pet professional about help or a referral. You can find out more about trainers and behavior consultants in the Pamphlet for Pet Parents of the same name.

What Not to Do When You Are Housetraining

Accidents will happen. Don't punish your dog if you did not catch him in the act. Rubbing his nose in the waste, shaking him or hitting him will only frighten him and will not teach him to not go in the house. If you punish him for accidents, he only learns not to relieve himself in front of you. Dogs should be housetrained without punishment or discipline.

Never punish your dog after the fact. Dogs cannot associate the act of eliminating with punishment that occurs minutes or hours after the fact. Punishment only works when it is immediate. Simply ignore the accident and clean up mistakes with an enzymatic cleaner (enzymatic solutions digest the odor producing bacteria in waste) and make sure you are managing the environment and observing your dog for signs of a need to eliminate.

Don't rush your dog when you take him to eliminate or immediately take him in after eliminating or immediately end a walk after eliminating. If good things end after eliminating, your dog may delay or wait until he is back in the house. If your dog has an accident and 'looks guilty' or 'acts

To housetrain a dog you need to be consistent, persistent and patient.

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remorseful', he is only reacting to your body language or tone of voice. Despite the way it looks, he doesn't know he has done wrong. He is trying to stop your punishment or disapproval by acting submissively. He doesn't know that going potty on the carpet two hours ago is why you are upset. If you are having difficulty housetraining your dog, consult your veterinarian, as there could be a medical reason for the difficulty. Inappropriate elimination can be the result of medical problems, submissive/excitement urination, urine marking, separation anxiety, fears or phobias as well as incomplete or inappropriate housetraining. To learn more about elimination problems in dogs see the Pamphlet for Pet Parents on this topic. You can also learn more about housetraining dogs from the DVD "Housetraining: A Plan for Success" available at PETSMART and PETSMART.com.

Drs. Suzanne Hetts and Dan Estep are Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists and international award-winning speakers and authors living in Denver, Colorado. For over 25 years they have been helping pet parents understand their pet's behavior and solve behavior problems.



The Golden Rules for Housetraining Puppies and Adult Dogs

Post this near your back door, the potty spot,
your dog's bed, or where you will see it every day!

- I. **Have realistic expectations**
Success won't happen overnight
You must be consistent
You must be patient
- II. **Make accidents impossible**
Supervise your dog all the time
When you can't supervise him, put him in an area
where he is unlikely to have accidents
- III. **Give your dog plenty of opportunities
to go in the right places**
Take him to his potty spot first thing in the morning,
last thing at night, after meals, after naps, after play
and every few hours during the day
- IV. **Reward your dog for going when
he should and where he should**
Immediately use tasty food treats and/or praise when
he goes where he should

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