BEHAVIOR SERIES

Housetraining Your Puppy

CONTRARY TO popular belief, housetraining a puppy requires far more than a few stacks of old newspapers—it calls for vigilance, patience, and plenty of commitment. By following the procedures outlined below, you can minimize house soiling incidents, but virtually every puppy will have an accident in the house, and more likely, several. Expect this—it's part of raising a puppy. The more consistent you are in following the basic housetraining procedures, however, the faster your puppy will learn acceptable behavior. It may take several weeks to housetrain your puppy, and with some of the smaller breeds, it might take longer.

Establish a Routine

Like babies, puppies do best on a regular schedule. Take your puppy outside frequently—at least every two hours—and immediately after he wakes up from a nap, after playing, and after eating or drinking.

Praise your puppy lavishly every time he eliminates outdoors—you can even give him a treat—but remember to do so immediately after he's finished eliminating, not after he comes back inside the house. This step is vital, because rewarding your dog for eliminating outdoors is the only way he'll know what's expected of him.

Pick a bathroom spot near the door, and always take your puppy to that spot using a leash. Take him out for a longer walk or some playtime only after he has eliminated. If you clean up an accident in the house, take the soiled rags or paper towels and leave them in the bathroom spot. The smell will help your puppy recognize the area as the place he is supposed to eliminate. While your puppy is eliminating, use a word or phrase like "go potty" that you can eventually use before he eliminates to remind him what to do.

Put your puppy on a regular feeding schedule and feed him a high-quality diet to make housetraining easier. Depending on their age, puppies usually need to be fed three or four times a day. Feeding your puppy at the same times each day will make it more likely that he'll eliminate at consistent times as well, and that makes housetraining easier for both of you.

Keep Your Eyes Peeled

Don't give your puppy an opportunity to soil in the house; keep an eye on him whenever he's indoors. You can tether him to you with a six-foot leash, or use baby gates to keep him in the room where you are. Watch for signs that he needs to eliminate, like sniffing around or circling. When you see these signs, immediately grab the leash and take him outside to his bathroom spot. If he eliminates, praise him lavishly and reward him with a treat.

Confinement

When you're unable to watch your puppy at all times, he should be confined to an area small enough that he won't want to eliminate there. The space should be just big enough for him to comfortably stand, lie down, and turn around in. You can use a portion of a bathroom or laundry room blocked off with baby gates. Or you may want to crate train your puppy and use the crate to confine him. (Be sure to learn how to use a crate

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humanely as a method of confinement.) If your puppy has spent several hours in confinement, you'll need to take him directly to his bathroom spot as soon as you let him out, and praise him when he eliminates.

Oops!

Expect your puppy to have a few accidents in the house—it's a normal part of housetraining. Here's what to do when that happens:

- When you catch him in the act of eliminating in the house, do something to interrupt him, like make a startling noise (be careful not to scare him). Immediately take him to his bathroom spot, praise him, and give him a treat if he finishes eliminating there.
- Don't punish your puppy for eliminating in the house. If you find a soiled area, it's too late to administer a correction. Just clean it up. Rubbing your puppy's nose in it, taking him to the spot and scolding him, or any other punishment will only make him afraid of you or afraid to eliminate in your presence. In fact, punishment will often do more harm than good.
- Cleaning the soiled area is very important because puppies are highly motivated to continue soiling in areas that smell like urine or feces.

It's extremely important that you use the supervision and confinement procedures outlined above to prevent the number of accidents. If you allow your puppy to eliminate frequently in the house, he'll get confused about where he's supposed to eliminate, which will prolong the housetraining process.

Paper Training

A puppy under six months of age cannot be expected to control his bladder for more than a few hours at a time. If you have to be away from home more than four or five hours a day, this may not be the best time for you to get a puppy; instead, you may want to consider an older dog, who can wait for your return.

But if you're already committed to having a puppy and must be away for long periods of time, you'll need to make arrangements for someone, such as a responsible neighbor or a professional pet sitter, to take him outside to eliminate. Or you'll need to train him to eliminate in a specific place indoors. Be aware, however, that doing so can prolong the process of housetraining. Teaching your puppy to eliminate on newspaper may create a lifelong surface preference, meaning that even as an adult he may eliminate on any newspaper lying around the living room.

When your puppy must be left alone for long periods of time, confine him to an area with enough room for a sleeping space, a playing space, and a separate place to eliminate. In the area designated as the elimination area, use either newspapers or a sod box. To make a sod box, place sod in a container such as a child's small plastic swimming pool. You can also find dog litter products at a pet supply store. If you clean up an accident in the house, put the soiled rags or paper towels in the designated elimination area. The smell will help your puppy recognize the area as the place where he is supposed to eliminate.

Other Types of House Soiling Problems

If you've consistently followed the housetraining procedures and your puppy continues to eliminate in the house, there may be another reason for his behavior.

- **Medical Problems:** House soiling can often be caused by physical problems such as a urinary tract infection or a parasite infection. Check with your veterinarian to rule out any possibility of disease or illness.
- **Submissive/Excitement Urination:** Some dogs, especially young ones, temporarily lose control of their bladders when they become excited or feel threatened. This usually occurs during greetings or periods of intense play or when they're about to be punished.
- **Territorial Urine-Marking:** Dogs sometimes deposit small amounts of urine or feces to scent-mark their territory. Both male and female dogs do this, and it most often occurs when they believe their territory has been invaded.
- **Separation Anxiety:** Dogs who become anxious when they're left alone may house soil as a result. Usually, there are other symptoms as well, such as destructive behavior or vocalization.
- **Fears or Phobias:** When animals become frightened, they may lose control of their bladder or bowels. If your puppy is afraid of loud noises such as thunderstorms or fireworks, he may house soil when he's exposed to these sounds.

Related topics at *www.petsforlife.org*

- Crate Training Your Dog

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