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## A Guide to Potty Training

### Introduction

If your dog is to be a good companion, he needs to be trained to relieve himself outside not in your house. This method of housetraining is focused on preventing “accidents” instead of waiting for accidents to happen. The goal is to make it easy for the puppy to do the right thing in the first place. Training in this way is faster and more effective than punishing the dog for mistakes. YOU play the most important part in the success or failure of this method — you must be patient, determined and reliable for it to work. If you already own an adult dog with housetraining problems, you can use this method to start fresh just as you would with a puppy.

This method also requires the use of a dog crate or at least, a small, confined area for the pup to stay in when he can't be supervised. A crate isn't cruel! It's your dog's own private room where he can rest and stay safe, secure and out of trouble. Just like a small child, your puppy needs to be protected from hurting himself and destroying your furniture. A crate will make the job so much easier! Set up a dog crate or small, confined area (the smaller the better.) Using a dog crate will be more effective. The size of the crate is important — if it's too large, the puppy will have room to use one end as a bathroom. If you've bought a crate for him to “grow into,” you can also get dividers to reduce the inner space while he's small. If he must be left alone while you're at work, then a larger crate is okay. Put a stack of newspapers at one end for him to use when you can't be home to let him out.

Also in the crate should be a water dish (you can get one that attaches to the side of the crate and is harder to spill), sleeping pad and toys. Put the crate where he isn't shut away from the family. If you're using a confined area instead, a baby gate across the doorway is preferable to closing the door and isolating your puppy.

Your puppy might not like the crate at first. Don't give in to his complaining or tantrums! If you're sure he isn't hungry or has to go potty, ignore his yowling. If he gets really obnoxious, reach inside the crate, give him a little shake by the scruff of his neck and say **NO** in a deep, stern voice. Eventually he'll settle down and sleep which is what crates are for! If you give a tempting treat every time you put the dog in his crate, he'll soon look forward to going in.



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The crate is intended to be his sleeping and is where he should be when you can't keep a close eye on him. If you give him the run of the house at this age, you can expect accidents! Dogs instinctively keep their sleeping areas clean. If you've allowed him to go potty when he needs to, he won't dirty his crate if he can help it. Always take the puppy outside first thing when you let him out of the crate and CARRY the puppy to the door!! This is important. Puppies seem to have a reflex peeing action that takes affect the moment they step out of the crate onto your carpeting. If you let him walk to the door, he'll probably have an accident before he gets there. Part of this training method is psychological — you want the puppy to feel grass under his feet when he goes to the bathroom, not your carpeting!

If he cries during the night, he probably has to go out. Carry him outside to potty, and then put him back in the crate with a minimum of cuddling. If you play with him, he might decide he doesn't want to go back to sleep! Puppies usually sleep through the night within a few days.

Once he's developed better control, he won't need the newspapers unless you're going to be gone all day. Change the papers several times a day if they've been soiled.

## **Getting On the Right Track**

The first few weeks of owning a puppy are some of the hardest and most important. Baby puppies, under three months of age, have limited bladder control and reflexes. They usually don't know they're going to "go" until the moment they do! It's not realistic to expect them to tell you ahead of time. If you're observant, you'll see that a puppy who's looking for a place to go potty will suddenly circle about while sniffing the floor. The sniffing is instinct — he's looking for a place that's already been used. If he can't find one, he'll start one! By preventing accidents in the house, you'll teach him that the only appropriate bathroom is the one outside!

Spending extra time and effort now will pay off in a big way. Don't blame the puppy if you're lazy! Like people, puppies do best when they consistently receive clear expectations and are rewarded for good behavior. It is up to you to set clear, consistent rules your dog can follow.

The first course of action in housetraining is to promote the desired behavior. You need to:

- Designate a general potty area outdoors (realize a dog can't tell the difference between piddling on grass or petunias).
- Guide your dog there to do his business.
- Heartily praise him when he goes.



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Note that once the doggie “initiates” a chosen space in the general potty area, she'll use the odor from the first visit as a clue to tell her where to go in the future.

## **Timing Is Important!**

A six- to eight-week-old puppy should be taken outdoors every one to two hours. Older puppies and older dogs can generally wait longer between outings. Be in tune with your dog's needs, puppies should be taken out:

- After waking in the morning
- After naps
- After meals
- After playing or training
- After being left alone
- Immediately before being put to bed

If a dog and especially a puppy are not allowed to relieve itself at the above times, it will most likely have an accident. Don't wait for the dog to “tell” you that it has to go out. Just assume that he does and put him outside.

## **Puppy Daytime schedule**

Establish a regular schedule of potty trips and feedings. This helps you to control the times he has to go out and prevent accidents in the house. First thing in the morning — before you have your coffee — carry the puppy outside. He can then come in and play for an hour. Feed breakfast and then put the puppy in the crate and in a half hour carry him outside for potty. Puppies usually have a bowel movement after each meal so give him time to accomplish it.

Now he can have another inside playtime for an hour or so. Don't give him free run of the house, use baby gates or close doors to keep him out of rooms he shouldn't go in. (Puppies are notorious for finding out of the way corners to have accidents in — keep him in an area where you can watch him). If you give him too much freedom too soon, he'll probably make a mistake. After playtime, take him outside again then tuck him into his crate for a nap.

For the first month or so, you'll be feeding three or four meals per day. Repeat the same procedure throughout the day: potty outside first thing in the morning, one hour playtime,



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potty, meal then in crate, potty, playtime, potty, nap, potty, playtime, meal, etc. The playtimes can be lengthened as the puppy gets older and is more reliable. Eventually the puppy will be letting you know when he needs to go out but remember — if you ignore his request or don't move quickly he'll have an accident!

I know this sounds like a lot of work and it is! The results of all this running in and out will pay off in a well-housebroken puppy and clean carpets. Keep in mind that some breeds are easier to housetrain than others and how the puppy was raised before it came to you has an effect, too. Pet store puppies who were allowed to use wire-bottom crates have less inclination to keep their crates clean. Puppies that were raised in garages or other large areas where they could “go” wherever will also be a little more difficult. Don't give up though - you can train them, it will just take a little longer.

A word about paper-training: It seems harmless to leave papers about “just in case” and for us who work all day, it's a necessity. However, paper-training your pup will make the overall job of housetraining that much harder and take longer. By only allowing the pup to relieve itself outside, you're teaching it that it's not acceptable to use the house. Using newspapers will override this training. Also, be aware that many puppies get the notion that going potty NEAR the papers is as good as going ON them! If you must use newspapers when you're gone, keep to the regular housetraining schedule when you're at home. Get the puppy outside often enough and don't leave papers out “just in case.”

Keep your dog's yard picked up and free of old stools. Many dogs choose an area to use as a bathroom. If left to become filthy, they'll refuse to use it and do their business in the house instead! If your dog has to be tied up when he's outside, keeping the area clean is even more critical. If you could only move about in a small area, you wouldn't want to lie next to the toilet, would you? Picking up stools helps you keep tabs on your dog's health as well. Stools should be firm and fairly dry. Loose, sloppy stools can be an indication of worms, health problems, stress or digestive upset.

## **Older Dog Schedule**

You can use a modified puppy schedule to train a non-housetrained older dog or one that's having housetraining problems. Start from the beginning just like a puppy, use a crate and put them on a schedule. An older dog can be expected to control itself for longer periods provided you take it outside at critical times — first thing in the morning, after meals and last thing at night. Until they're reliable, get them outside every three-to-four hours in between those times.



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Adopted older dogs that have always had freedom may be unwilling to have a bowel movement when on a leash. You can either walk them longer or keep them confined until they really got to go. Just like a puppy, don't give them the run of the house and keep them in a crate or small area if you can't supervise them. You can give them more freedom as they become more reliable.

### **If your Puppy has an Accident**

Remember, the above method of housetraining is based on PREVENTING accidents. By faithfully taking the puppy or older dog out often enough, you'll get faster results than if you discipline the puppy or older dog after the accident has already happened. If your puppy or older dog makes a mistake because you didn't get him out when you should have — it's not his fault!

Do not use harsh punishment, correct mistakes **GENTLY** and **APPROPRIATELY**. Also, remember NEVER correct your dog for relieving in the house if you didn't see him do it. If you catch the pup in the act, stay calm. A sharp noise, such as a loud **NO** or **simply providing a moderate, startling distraction such as a quick stomp on the floor**, is all that is usually needed to stop the behavior. Don't be too loud or your pet may learn to avoid going in front of you, even outdoors. Scoop the puppy up immediately - don't wait for him to stop piddling - and carry him outside to an area he's used before. As you set him on the ground, tell him **"GO POTTY"** and praise him as he finishes the job. Keep him out a few more minutes to make sure he's done before bringing him back in.

This is a little trickier with an adult dog especially if he's new to you and you don't know how he'll react to being grabbed and thrust outside. As with puppy use a sharp noise, such as a loud NO or simply providing a moderate, startling distraction such as a quick stomp on the floor, is all that is usually needed to stop the behavior. Take him outside to show him where the bathroom is. Make a point of getting the dog out more often in the future!

ANY other corrections such as rubbing his nose in it, smacking with newspapers, yelling, beating or slapping only confuse and scare the dog. If you come across an "old" accident, it really doesn't pay to get too excited about it. Dogs aren't wired to connect a past act with your present anger and he won't understand what you're so mad about. He'll act guilty but it's only because he knows you're mad at him. He has no real idea why. The only thing you may want to do is to point the spot out to him and say **"WHAT IS THIS?"** but that should be limit of your correction.



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Keep in mind that health problems, changes in diet and emotional upsets (moving to a new home, adding a new pet or family member, etc.) can cause temporary lapses in housetraining. Diabetes in adult dogs and urinary tract infections in both puppies and adults can cause dogs to have to urinate more often. Urinary infections in young female puppies are common. A symptom is frequent squatting with little urine release. If you suspect a medical problem, please take your dog to your veterinarian for an examination.

Sudden changes in dog food brands or overindulgence in treats or table scraps can cause diarrhea. Dogs don't need much variety in their diets so you're not harming yours by staying to one brand of food. If you make a change, do it gradually by mixing a little of the new food with the old, gradually increasing the amount of new food every day. A sudden change of water can cause digestive upset, too. If you're moving or traveling, take along a couple gallons of "home" water to mix with the new. Distilled water from the grocery store can also be used.

## **Cleaning up Accidents**

If your dog does relieve in the house, clean the area immediately and thoroughly. Dogs have a keen sense of smell. They may be drawn back to the spot by their own scent.

If you've worked hard with this training method, you won't have many! Put your puppy or older dog out of sight while you clean up a puddle. Dog mothers clean up after their babies but you don't want your puppy or older dog to think that **YOU do, too!** Clean up on linoleum is self-explanatory. On carpeting, get lots of paper towel and continue blotting with fresh paper until you've lifted as much liquid as possible.

There are several home-made and commercially available "odor killers" that are helpful. In a pinch, plain white vinegar will work to help neutralize the odor and the ammonia in the urine. (Don't use a cleaner with ammonia - it'll make it worse!) Sprinkle baking soda on the spot to soak up moisture and to help neutralize odor, vacuum when dry. At the pet store, you can find a good selection of products that may be more effective. A diarrhea stain on carpeting or upholstery can be lifted with a gentle solution of lukewarm water, dishwashing soap and white vinegar.

Puppies or older dogs are attracted to urine odors and their noses are much better than ours! Even when using a commercial odor killer, a teeny residue will be left behind that our puppies or older dogs can smell. Keep an eye on that spot in the future! This remarkable scenting ability does have an advantage — if you must paper-train your puppy or older dog and he doesn't know what newspapers are for yet, "house-breaking pads" are available at your pet





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store. They are treated with a mild attractive odor (too weak for us to smell), so your puppy will gladly use them!

### **Be in tune with your dog's needs (what goes in must come out):**

- Observe the pattern of times he may need to relieve. Little puppies cannot wait very long, while older dog can learn to "hold it."
- More frequently if he is feeling stressed.
- Take your puppy or older dog out to relieve every time he asks to go out or shows behaviors indicating he needs to relieve, every time you think he might need to relieve, and when he is scheduled to go out.
- Do not load him up with water right before bedtime. TAKE CARE NOT TO LIMIT HIS WATER TOO SEVERELY BECAUSE IT MAY MAKE YOUR PUPPY OR OLDER DOG SICK.
- Feed him his last meal early in the evening (before 6:00 p.m.) so his bowels can empty before bedtime. Always offer him an extra opportunity to relieve after his last meal of the day.
- Read the body language that signals when he needs to relieve.

Some pups sniff the ground or floor intently or start circling just before relieving.

Other pups may walk differently or suddenly interrupt an activity when they feel the need to relieve.

He may have a whine or bark which signals he needs to relieve.

Observe if he needs to relieve more than once each time out.

Take him out when he signals, even if it's in the middle of the night.

- Walking activates the bladder and bowel.
- The younger the puppy, the more frequently he needs to relieve.
- Nervousness activates the bladder and bowel.
- Wait for a while before taking him back into the house if you think he may need to relieve again.



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- It is also important to remember that young puppies have very little self control, so, when he is little, your relieving area should be very close to the door you use to take him out to relieve. As he gets older, gradually move his relieving area farther away from the door.
- As he gets older, you can begin to gradually extend the time between relieving breaks. This process of gradually extending the time you ask him to wait will teach him self control in a stress free manner.

## **Having Your Dog Relieve on Command**

To avoid spending a lot of time waiting for your dog to go, you may want to teach him to potty on command. Teaching your canine the secrets of relieving on command is actually easier than most people think. The following are a few simple techniques for relieving your dog on command:

- Start by taking the dog, on-leash, to his relieving area at your home. Young puppies in a hurry may need, at first, to be carried to the relieving area.
- At first, use the same area as the odors in that area may stimulate him to relieve.
- Once you are at the relieving area, allow the dog to sniff the ground.
- Stand still and never permit your dog to drag you over to objects or different areas when he wants to relieve. Stand still and stay in the area where you are standing while you relieve him. It is ok to let him move around on the end of the leash, even if he moves behind you, just don't follow him when he tries to move farther away than the end of your leash.
- Leash relieve every time for several weeks; do not just turn him loose in the yard.
- The moment he begins to relieve, simply repeat a unique command, such as "hurry up", "potty," or "Do your business" in an upbeat tone of voice followed by praise. It is important, in the beginning, to wait until the dog is actually urinating or defecating to say your unique command. This will help him relate what you are saying with what he is doing. Make a huge deal of successes, clapping, cheering, to let her know she's done a good job.
- When he seems to understand the connection between relieving himself and the command, the next step is to say the command immediately before he starts to relieve.





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- Once you have done this a few times, try saying the command while he is circling or showing other signs that indicate that he is preparing to relieve but hasn't actually started.
- Finally, begin saying the command as soon as he reaches the spot that you use for relieving him keeping your voice calm and positive throughout.
- Promptly dispose of all dog wastes so your dog will have a clean area to use for relieving. Some dogs will not relieve in a "dirty" area.

Try not to get discouraged if he does not relieve every time you take him out or if he needs to relieve again after he just came in. It may take him awhile to learn what is expected of him, so be patient when he has an accident. The fewer opportunities he has to relieve in the house, the easier it will be for him to learn to relieve outside.

After a few weeks of training, you'll notice that when you say the command your dog will begin pre-potty sniffing, circling and then potty shortly after you give the command. Be sure to praise him for his accomplishments.

## **Relieving on Different Surfaces**

Teach the dog to relieve comfortably on command on all surfaces. It's very important to regularly practice relieving on different surfaces (concrete, gravel and asphalt, not just grass) especially during the first weeks and throughout your pets life time.

- Begin by using different relieving sites in your yard.
- Stay with each new spot until he will reliably (3-4 times in a row) leash relieve at that spot.
- Advance to new spots in your yard with gradually increasing frequency until he goes anywhere in your yard on command.
- Advance slowly to different spots outside of the yard.
- If your dog is reluctant to leash relieve away from home, try to start with his favorite surface and then gradually try other surfaces after he will readily relieve on leash on his favorite surface away from home.
- Praise all success.



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## **Male Dog Marking**

Your male puppy will begin to lift his leg between four and nine months of age, a sign of the activation of his sexual drive and instinct to “mark” territory. This is a perfect age to neuter your dog and avoid the unwanted behaviors that accompany sexual maturity — marking in inappropriate places, fighting and aggression toward other male dogs. Intact (un-neutered) males will mark any upright object and are especially hard on your shrubbery and trees. Some males will also mark inside the house, particularly if another dog comes to visit or if you're visiting in someone else's home. If you use your male for breeding, you can expect this behavior to get worse. Talk to your veterinarian about neutering your dog to protect his health, help him to live longer and be a better pet along with improving his house manners!

Marking can be discouraged if you always relieve a male dog away from vertical objects such as trees, bushes and the sides of buildings. Try to choose level areas without vertical objects for relieving areas. Male puppies or older dog's that continually try to mark vertical objects without a command should be walked towards bushes, posts and other vertical objects and corrected as they raise their leg. After a few exercises such as this, encourage the dog to relieve on command.

## **Your Puppy or Older Dog Will Succeed!**

Using the following house training tips along with ample amounts of supervision and positive reinforcement will get you started on the road to proper potty training. Yes, the process of housebreaking will try your patience. But know the majority of pups and even older dogs get the idea pretty fast, providing you offer them consistent rules and praise. While you're waiting, remind yourself that housebreaking is a skill, like reading and writing, which demands practice, time and patience.