



Housetraining Your Adult Dog

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No matter what age your adopted dog is, you should assume they are not housebroken. Dogs in a shelter environment often are not able to get outdoors when they need to eliminate so even if they were trained in their last home, they may have lost that behavior prior to adoption. Your house may also have odors of other animals that can lead to marking as your dog gets used to its new home. Dogs need some time to get used to their new environment, so carefully watch them in the first few weeks to prevent accidents and learn their elimination cues.

If your dog was previously housetrained, you will have an easier time getting it used to using the restroom outdoors. You should assume, however, that your dog is not housebroken so you can prevent any lapses in training. It will take some time for your dog to get used to signaling you when it needs to eliminate. It will also take time for you to read this cues. Follow these suggestions to make the housebreaking process easy on you and your dog.

Housetraining Made Easy

- Establish a routine. Try to get your dog on a set schedule of elimination. Take it out first thing in the morning and the last thing at night. Dogs don't know that you want to sleep in on the weekend so make sure you are taking it out at the same time every day.
- Feed your dog on a set schedule, preferably twice a day. This will make its need to eliminate more consistent. Feeding high quality dry dog food will cut down on the amount of stool and limit digestive distress. When changing foods, gradually mix the foods over a week to ten days to get their stomachs used to the change.
- At bathroom time, try to take your pet out the same door every time. This will make it easier for your dog to signal when he needs to go out.
- Establish a specific area for your dog to eliminate. Make sure it is not too far from the door. Keep the dog on a leash and walk it to the same spot whenever it goes out. It only gets to play or go for a walk after it eliminates. Your dog will not be allowed to have free run of the house until it eliminates outside.
- Use a command to get the dog to go on cue. Once you take the dog to the bathroom spot, say "go potty" and praise it when they does eliminate. You need to make a big deal out of it eliminating outside. Praise it and give it a small food treat. This will make it more likely that it will eliminate outdoors.
- Do not let the dog practice going to the bathroom indoors. When it is in the house do not let it have free run until you are certain they have eliminated outdoors. When your dog is in the house, keep it tethered to you so you can watch for its elimination cues. If you are unable to watch it, keep it confined in a crate or a small area where it won't eliminate (see handout: "Crate Training Your Dog").

Accidents

- Most housebreaking errors are caused by human error. You are responsible for making sure your dog makes the right decisions. However accidents do occasionally occur. Just start over with your housebreaking routine and your dog will be back on track in no time.
- After an accident, make sure you thoroughly clean the area. Use a high quality enzymatic cleaner available at pet stores. Typical household cleaners will not work. Keep the dog away from the area until it has thoroughly dried.
- If you catch your dog beginning to eliminate indoors, quickly say "outside" and take it to their elimination spot. Try not to yell at it or scare it. This will only make the dog fear urinating in front of you and will begin to hide to eliminate. Praise it when it's finish using the bathroom outdoors.
- Do not punish your dog if it does have an accident. The dog is just not used to the rules of the house. Try to be patient and consistent.

Other Housetraining Problems

If you have been consistent with your housetraining and your dog is still having problems several months later, you might want to consider other extenuating circumstances.

- **Medical Problems:** physical problems will make housetraining impossible. Have your dog checked out by a veterinarian to rule out a urinary tract infection, age related incontinence or parasites.
- **Submissive Urination:** some dogs, especially young ones, temporarily lose control of their bladder when they become excited or feel threatened. This usually occurs during greeting, play or when they are being punished. (see handout: "Submissive Urination").
- **Territorial Marking:** dogs sometime deposit small amounts of urine to mark their home area. This tells other dogs that there is a dog already living here. Dogs are more susceptible to this practice if they are not neutered or if there are other pets in the house. Make sure to thoroughly clean your carpet and furnishings before a new dog enters a home with resident pets.
- **Separation Anxiety:** dogs from a shelter environment sometimes suffer from an irrational fear of being left alone. In their owner's absence, they may become destructive and also lose control of their bladders or have a bowel movement in the house. Never punish a dog for this behavior. (see handout: "Separation Anxiety").
- **Fears or Phobias:** like separation anxiety, dogs have emotional problems like humans. Phobic dogs may have housetraining lapses during monsoon season because of the lightning and thunder. Some dogs simply do not like to go outside during a rainstorm. Talk to a behaviorist or your veterinarian to get help with phobias.

While housetraining may take some time, try to be patient and consistent with your new family member. Your dog is getting used to you as you are getting used to it. The easiest way to train the dog is to keep it from having any accidents in the home in the first place. Also, rewarding the dog for the correct behavior will make the behavior more likely to occur in the future. Have fun with your new pet and good luck!