



POTTY TRAINING BASICS FOR PUPPIES AND ADULT DOGS

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Training a puppy or dog to eliminate outside instead of inside the house can be surprisingly quick and easy. Unfortunately, more people are aware of the "old wives tale" type of methods than they are good, solid, science-based techniques. If you thought it was normal to take months or longer to potty train a dog, you're probably using these old methods!

Supervision

This is key. Whenever your puppy is not under your direct supervision, he should be crated or tethered to you. This way you can be aware if he is sniffing to let you know he needs to potty. Just like a human infant would not be safe crawling around the house when he's not being watched, a young puppy also needs the equivalent of a crib or play-pen to keep him out of trouble.

How long can the puppy hold it?

Your puppy can hold her bladder, at most, her age in months + 1. For example, if your puppy is 2 months old, she can possibly hold it 3 hours. But this is only a general estimate. A resting or sleeping puppy may be able to go longer. One who has just eaten and is running around like a maniac may not be able to make it 10 minutes.

Some pups can hold their bladder overnight, while they are sleeping. If your puppy can, consider yourself one of the lucky ones! If not, you may have to get up to take your puppy outside several times a night when he gets restless. It's best that the crate is located in your room where you can more easily respond when you hear your puppy. The older the puppy gets, the more bladder control he develops, so this won't last forever. The more effort you put into being consistent, the quicker it will happen.

How does a puppy learn to hold it?

A dog normally does not want to eliminate in her sleeping area. This is why crating is so helpful in potty training. The size of the crate should allow your pup to stretch out comfortably and turn around, but not be big enough so that she can eliminate in one end and sleep in the other. Unless her breeder forced her to live in an environment where she had no choice but to lie in her mess and ruined this instinct, she will normally hold it rather than do that.

Most dog owners use one family-oriented room when playing with their puppies, such as the living room. This is where the pup spends most of his time when he's not crated. So this will be the next place that he considers his personal living area, and he will be more likely to go outside of this area to potty. Many owners notice that their puppy will choose to leave this room to go in a hallway, other room, or behind furniture. This is because those places have not yet been accepted as one of the dog's personal areas.

As mentioned before, supervision is key. When the pup is in this room and running free, there must be a human directly watching him. If he has the opportunity to eliminate undetected, he will have just learned that it is normal to go in that room. Now you not only have to teach him where to go, you also have a habit to break. He also must not be allowed access to any other area in the house at this point unless he is tethered or being watched. Prevention of accidents will go a long way in expediting your puppy's training.

Once your puppy has not eliminated in one area for 2-3 weeks, then you can open up another small area for him. Spend time with him in there. Feed him in there, play with him in there, let him take naps there. Once he hasn't eliminated in that area for 2-3 weeks, you can open up another area. This is how your puppy will learn that your whole house is a potty-free zone.

Potty training procedure

Dogs are creatures of habit. The more purposefully planned your potty breaks, the easier time your puppy will have understanding what is expected of her. One of the most common complaints I hear is: "I took my puppy out walking for an hour, and she didn't poop. As soon as we got in the door, she squatted!" This is because your puppy is a very intelligent creature. She loves her walkies, and it doesn't take long for a puppy to learn that as soon as she eliminates, the walkies are over. For you, that's the purpose of the walk. So if that ends it, she may hold it as long as she can to try to avoid having the walk end.

The procedure for teaching your puppy what you want her to do is:

- Always take her out on leash, through the same door, and go to the same spot where you would prefer that she eliminate.
- Stand quietly, not playing, not entertaining her in any way. If she starts to sniff or circle, you can quietly say, "go potty."
- Once she goes, praise and reward her lavishly and take her for walkies. If she doesn't go in 5-10 minutes, take her back inside and put her in the crate. Try again in 20 minutes.

If you just open the door and let your puppy run free in a fenced yard, there is little directed learning taking place. So even if you have a fenced yard, I highly recommend using a leash and following the procedure. As a reward after elimination, you can take the leash off and instruct him to "go play."

What happens when puppy makes a mistake?

When you catch your puppy in the act, distract him with a cheerful (NOT ANGRY) sound, and scoop him outside to his potty place as soon as possible, following the procedure above. It is suggested to carry him out there instead of letting him walk, because if he didn't finish he may not be able to hold it until you get him there.

If you don't catch him, don't do anything. Just clean it up. Always use an enzyme cleaner or your puppy will still be able to smell it and be drawn back to the same spot. If you discipline your puppy for housebreaking mistakes, it can backfire on you. Your puppy doesn't understand "Mommy/daddy doesn't want me to go here." He thinks you don't want him to GO. That can result in your puppy sneaking off to hide it, and may cause him to be reluctant to go outside in front of you. If you must discipline, take a rolled-up newspaper and whack yourself in the head with it, repeating, "I must remember to better supervise my puppy."

When does he need to go out?

After eating, after sleeping, after playing, and many times in-between. The more awake and active, the more often he has to go.

What goes in will come out

If you have your puppy on a low quality dog food, he will have to eat more of it to get the same nutrition, and that means he will also eliminate more. The best food for your puppy is one that gives him energy, a healthy shiny coat, bright eyes, firm stools and overall vitality. Each puppy is different, so there is no one best food. Unfortunately, most of the most popular and well-known brands of food are of poor quality, and that's all you will find in a grocery or department store.

Choose a food by carefully reading the ingredients list on the bag. At the very least, a meat that you recognize should be listed as the first ingredient (i.e., chicken or lamb, not "meat," and not by-products). Grains should be kept to a minimum, and corn, soy, wheat and white rice avoided completely. Also watch for and avoid preservatives such as BHT and BHA. Though you will pay more for a quality food, it is an investment in your puppy's health and can save you money in the long run from conditions caused by a lifetime of poor nutrition.

It's much easier to house-train your puppy if you have her on a feeding schedule instead of "free feeding" (leaving the food down at all times). A young puppy should eat 3 times a day, at the same times each day. Put down a measured amount, wait 10 minutes, and remove what is not eaten until the next feeding time. This will keep her regular so that you can better monitor when she needs to eliminate. A dog who is "free fed" is also usually harder to train with treats, since she is less likely to be food-motivated than one who has to wait for her meals.

A word on submissive urination

Some puppies will urinate a few drops (or more) when they are excited or fearful. Normally puppies outgrow this within a few months, though some can take quite a bit longer. This is an instinctive act of appeasement, and the puppy has no voluntary control over it. If you make a fuss over it, the pup will tend to do it even more. Manage it as calmly as you can. If your pup urinates upon greeting you when you come home, make your entrances as low-key as possible, ignoring him until he's calmed, or greet him outside.

My puppy was potty trained and now she's not!

What's changed? A new work schedule? New construction? Anybody leave or join your family? Dogs don't take well to change, and sometimes this can affect potty habits. If so, just go back to the Procedure and start over. It won't take as long. If there have been no major changes, take your puppy to the vet. Urinary tract infections are a fairly common cause for incontinence. Occasionally puppies develop a "leak" after spay or neuter surgery. This is correctable with medication.

Where to get training assistance

A good trainer can help you through the potty training, along with other common new puppy issues such as nipping, chewing, and proper socialization. See the Pet Professional Guild Trainers' Directory to find a qualified force-free trainer near you.