

# Toilet Training Your Puppy

It is an undeniable fact that puppies need to toilet. The frustrating part is the communication barrier as well as the lack of understanding about where and when it is appropriate to toilet. Puppies come to us with the simple motto: "If I have to, then I will". Puppies do not understand anything more than that. It is up to us to establish a bridge of understanding if they are to live with us harmoniously. We are the ones with all the requirements, not them! They'd be just as happy to take care of their needs the way they already know.

**The most successful toilet training methods consist of four key elements:**

- 1. Confinement**
- 2. Training**
- 3. Timing**
- 4. Praise**

This article will discuss them all and answer common housebreaking questions and address some special cases.

## **Confinement**

Puppies (or dogs who don't yet understand where it is appropriate to eliminate) need to be confined in order to facilitate the easiest toilet training. The best and most effective place to confine is in a crate or cage. At this point, don't leave anything on the bottom of the crate (blanket, newspaper etc). Puppies will make a project out of destroying it.

Dogs do not naturally toilet where they live, therefore the crate needs to be just large enough for puppy to turn around and lay down. Anything large will encourage a puppy to toilet at one end and sleep in the other. For those puppies who will grow quite a bit larger, use a crate that is sized for an adult and partition it to a small size using a homemade insert or a crate insert made by the crate company to fit your crate. This way you can adjust as the dog gets bigger.

## **Training and Praise**

When I teach a new dog where to toilet, I use a lead. Leads keep your dog close to you, where you can supervise and control everything that happens. Puppies especially, are easily distracted. A blowing leaf, new flower, stick, another animal - all can take a puppy's mind off the matter at hand. If you are near the dog with a lead in hand, a gentle tug will redirect away from the curiosity. Leads are also good to help teach and AREA to toilet (behind the garage etc). With a lead, you just take the dog there every time instead of letting them have free run.

I also teach words for toileting. This way, when the dog understands what the words mean, he will understand WHAT I want and WHEN I want it to happen. I usually use "Go Toilet" or "Busy Busy" for toileting. Remember when you choose a word that you will be repeating it A LOT!!!

As I take my dog outside on a lead, I start to teach him the word "OUTSIDE". "Let's go OUTSIDE!", "Do you need to go OUTSIDE"? "OUTSIDE" "OUTSIDE". In time your dog will learn that the word "OUTSIDE" is associated with toileting. Eventually you will be able to ask the dog "Do you need to go OUTSIDE?" and get a response like barking, running to the door or tail wagging.

### **Using the Lead & Words to Teach**

A slip lead (NOT CHOKE CHAIN) is quick and easy to slip on the dog to take him outside. If the puppy isn't used to the lead yet, just put it on and carry the dog outside. Ideally, you want to get to the toileting area quickly, so don't worry about getting the dog walking nicely on the lead, just get out there - lead training can be done later. As you are moving toward the toileting area say "Let's go OUTSIDE" "OUTSIDE YAY" Your emphasis should be on the word OUTSIDE. Once outside, set the puppy down and change your mantra to your word "Go Toilet". Let the dog sniff and move around a little, but keep him in a general area. Each time he gets distracted (leaf, bird etc) give the lead a gentle tug and repeat "Go Toilet". The command is generally not said in a firm or angry tone, nor in a soft or pleading way - it is usually said in an encouraging tone. When toileting occurs, use a happy tone and repeat "GOOD Toilet" You should use WORDS ONLY to reinforce toileting, because patting or treats can interrupt the act. Verbal praise needs to happen DURING the act, not after! Usually dogs will urinate first, then defecate. You need to become familiar with your dog's habits so you can wait for defecation, its no use picking the dog up as soon as it has urinated and putting it away as this will result in accidents and make toilet training far harder.

### **Timing**

Puppies earn freedom by toileting properly. The best time for a puppy to be out of his crate is AFTER toileting outside. This free time will still need to be supervised, so any inclination toward inappropriate toileting can be immediately addressed. Baby gates are great for limiting a puppy's area of freedom. A short, inexpensive lead (4ftish) attached to the puppy's collar works well and enables the owner to catch a quick puppy without grabbing for him which ultimately can create a fearful dog. This works well when he needs to be corrected for inappropriate behaviours like chewing, eating things, digging or toileting indoors.

### **The BEST rule of thumb is to ANTICIPATE the need!**

As a general rule, the length of time a puppy can be left confined in his crate without going outside is roughly equal to his age in months:

2 months old = 2 hours of confinement without toilet break

3 months old = 3 hours of confinement without toilet break

4 months old = 4 hours of confinement without toilet break

up to about 6-8 months of age.

**ANY TIME there is a change of activity, such as after waking up, playing, or eating, puppy MUST be taken OUTSIDE!**

Your puppy will also give certain indications each time he needs to toilet: abrupt stop of play, circling, sniffing, running out of a room. You will eventually become familiar with these "warning signs".

## **Accidents**

All is not lost if puppy eliminates in the house or in his crate. If you catch him in the act, make an abrupt noise (clap hands, say NO and use a firm low voice to illustrate your displeasure. "Bad Dog!", then start to make your voice friendlier and say "Lets go OUTSIDE" and take dog outside. Put him in the toileting area and say "Go Toilet", if the dog finished toileting outside, use lots of praise "Good Toilet".

Remember you **MUST** catch puppy **IN THE ACT** to facilitate an effective lesson. Rubbing his nose in "it" afterward only teaches him that "doo doo" in the house gets him in trouble!

**Timing...** of catching the puppy in the act in order to correct and teach.. of **PRAISE** for appropriate toileting.. is everything and **CONSISTENCY** is the key! Proper behaviour must be praised **EVERY TIME** you give a command and it is followed.

### *One last thought to ponder while dealing with the frustrations of potty training:*

a puppy that has NEVER eliminated in the house and been CAUGHT and CORRECTED has not yet learned that it is wrong. There **MUST** be "accidents" in order for REAL learning to take place!

### Common Questions and Problems

#### *"What about paper-training?"*

The old method of paper training can still be effective, however it adds unnecessary time and mess to the whole picture. Owners will have MUCH more cleanup and mess and smell with papers and they will STILL have to use the papers to transition puppy to the outside.

#### *"My puppy goes outside, then comes in and poops on the floor...!"*

You, as the owner/trainer, are at fault here. You are missing the two BIG keys in successful potty training:

1. You **MUST** accompany your puppy outside **WITH** a leash on to supervise elimination and
2. Freedom in the house is only earned by appropriate elimination outside. No pees or poos - NO **FREEDOM**, and puppy goes back in his crate. Next, the owner checks again in a time frame of 20 minutes to an hour and takes puppy outside on the **LEASH** for another opportunity to eliminate appropriately and earn freedom.

#### *"I stand at the door and watch while my puppy goes potty outside. When he is finished and comes back in, he gets a treat. Why do I have to go out with my puppy?"*

Your puppy is getting his treat for coming back into the house, **NOT** for appropriate elimination. Praise **MUST** happen **DURING** elimination to make the connection in puppy's mind. Some dogs will run outside and run back in without eliminating because they know they'll get a treat. This can also encourage frequent demands to go out - just so they can get a treat when they come in!

***"I leave my puppy outside to play for an hour or more, then I bring him in and he eliminates. Why couldn't he just do it while he was outside?"***

Well, he probably DID eliminate when he first went out, but he didn't have to go later, and he certainly doesn't have the human capacity to think "Well, my owner is probably going to take me inside soon, so I'd better get my business done while I'm outside!" YOU need to remind a puppy who has been outside for a while to "Go Potty!".

***"When will I know if my dog is housebroken?"***

Appropriate elimination FIRST happens primarily because we, as owners, control it. We are working, when we potty train, to establish a HABIT, and that will usually take two to three months, depending on how consistent and persistent you are as the owner/trainer.

Here are some indications your dog/puppy understands the program:

- "Accidents" in the house and/or crate have decreased during the training period to none or almost none.
- When you use your commands for elimination, your puppy responds by eliminating.
- Your puppy starts to "ask" to go outside by barking, running to the door, staring at you, or in some other way.
- The freedom you give your puppy is mostly "accident" free.

***"My puppy wakes me up at 3AM EVERY NIGHT! I take him out, he pees and then wants to play. I play with him for a while and put him back in his crate where he cries for some time before he settles down. How do I break him of this?"***

Nighttime needs should diminish quickly as the puppy gets older. At first, you may need to get up 2-3 times nightly for a 7-week-old pup. That frequency should quickly reduce to once a night for a 9-week-old pup. When a puppy cries in the night, you DO have to check on him - it's the only way he has to tell you there is a problem. YOU will soon learn which cries are "fussing" and which indicate a real need. Remember when I said you are working to establish a HABIT when potty training? Well, if you get up during the night to take puppy out and then play with him, you are establishing a nighttime play routine habit! Any nighttime trips outside should be all "business only": outside then back in the crate - PERIOD! Temporarily removing access to water by 7 or 8 p.m. will also help.

Special problems...

***Dogs or puppies purchased from a pet shop or other place where they were always kept in a small cage.***

These dogs never had a choice and HAD to eliminate where they lived. Owners must devote extra time to take such dogs outside more frequently in order to get elimination outside rather than in the crate. Elaborate praise when they "go" is essential so they learn that life is better all around when they eliminate outside. Elimination in the crate should be ignored and just cleaned up at first - with no correction or harsh words. Later, as the dog starts to understand "going outside" a little better, the same corrections used when your dog has an accident on the floor (see "Accidents" above) can be used for crate soiling. Training these dogs takes a lot of patience and time.

***About small breeds and "Sneaking"***

Some people say that small breeds can be difficult, if not impossible to potty train. This is NOT because they are stupid - actually they are rather smart; smart enough to sneak to out of the way places to make their deposits instead of asking to go outside. This just requires MORE vigilance on the owner's part, and LESS freedom for the dog. If necessary, the owner needs to attach the other end of the leash the dog is dragging to their belt loop to keep closer track of the sneak!

### ***Submissive Urination***

***"When I come home from work and let my dog out of her crate, she urinates all over when I'm greeting her. I yell at her and she pees more! Why does she DO that?"***

What your dog is doing is called submissive urination. It is NOT a housebreaking problem. She is telling you that she recognizes that you are the leader. When you yell at her, she pees more to say "Yes, I KNOW that you are alpha!" Usually submissive urination resolved by 2 years of age, but Bailey, my Golden Retriever, sometimes still does it at 9 years.

#### **Things you can do to deter submissive urination:**

1. DO NOT bend over the top of the dog, especially when greeting. That is a dominant position.
2. For some reason, sweet, happy talk makes dogs urinate - so happy greetings with a lot of conversation should be avoided.
3. DO NOT pet your dog to greet her - the best thing to do when greeting a submissive urinator is to fold your arms across your chest, turn and ignore, but encourage your dog to go outside right away. Praise when she urinates outside, and then you should be able to greet.
4. When visitors come over, have them greet your dog (on leash) outside on the porch or grass to avoid messes in the house.
5. DO NOT yell at your dog for being "bad" - this isn't being "bad" at all! It is actually dog language affirming your leadership.

### ***Spitefulness?***

***"When I leave the house, my dog frequently leaves me 'presents' of stool and/or urine. I know he hates me to leave, and I'm sure he's doing it out of spite."***

Dogs by nature are not spiteful animals. That is too much of a human emotion and too much reasoning: "If she leaves, then I'm going to poop on the floor because I know she HATES that! That'll teach her to leave me here alone!"

Usually, if there is an "accident" when the owner is gone these are usually the *real* reasons.

- I forgot to do my business outside (this is where my own dogs fit in!)
- I'm really not reliably potty trained and I don't completely understand the concept.
- I waited by the door to go outside but I couldn't get out and I just couldn't wait any longer!
- You left me all alone in this house! This is a BIG job, and we usually watch over the house together as a pack. This is too stressful for me. I'm so stressed I have to poop!
- I have too much freedom - and too soon - without supervision.

If you come home to "accidents", you need to consider these steps:

1. Backtrack on potty training - no matter what your dog's age. (We just had a brain glitch and need a refresher course)
2. Reduce the space of freedom - either with a crate, baby gates or a room.
3. Back to outside supervised potty breaks - with leash on so praise can be used at the right time.
4. Make sure there is no physical cause for the problem (intestinal parasites, urinary tract infection, etc.)

### ***Questions to ask yourself if you are having problems...***

- Am I taking the dog out enough?
- Do I know every time he goes?
- Does he have too much freedom in the house?
- Am I watching him carefully when he is free in the house?

- Is there any physical reason (intestinal parasites, urinary tract infection, etc.)?
- Am I trying to move things along faster than this dog is able to learn - therefore skipping steps so the entire picture is unclear to my dog?

Am I consistently praising for appropriate