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## Housetraining 101

Make no mistake; raising a puppy is a labor intensive endeavor. Before taking on this responsibility, be sure that you and your family have the time and energy to invest in the puppy. Time to help him/her grow into the best dog they can be. Time to teach the pup how to live with human house rules. Time to socialize and to properly and completely housetrain the puppy.

Isn't it common sense for a dog to want to eliminate outside in that little patch of grass at the back corner of the yard rather than on the dining room carpet? Ask anyone who is in the process of housetraining a puppy or has housetrained one in the past and they'll undoubtedly tell you, "No". But it's not just pups that have this potty dilemma. Some adult dogs fail to fully grasp the whole housetraining concept too. So, how can a puppy or dog get the message that outside is the only place they should relieve themselves?

If you can perform these three rules *consistently* you'll be on the road to success:  
(*The key, here, is consistency paired with patience*)

1. Positively reinforce desired behavior
2. Interrupt and redirect undesired behavior
3. Never let the pup/dog out of your sight! (*Is this even possible, you must be thinking?*)

We'll look at these points more closely later, but first let's consider how the puppy's mind works:

By eight to nine weeks of age, puppies are attracted by the odors of urine and feces to specific areas for elimination. Use this information to your advantage. First and foremost, neutralize **ALL** odor indoors by using an enzymatic or bacteria-containing product (*see stain removal guide*) on all previously soiled areas. The "sniff" check is not enough. Even if you *can't* smell any traces of urine or feces in the carpet, your dog or pup surely *can* and will be drawn back time and again to re-soil those areas.

Another dog trait that you can use to your advantage is their instinctual desire to keep their resting/eating area, or "den", clean. A good "den" can be a dog crate of appropriate size (big enough to be comfortable but not so big as to be able to eliminate at one end and sleep at the other end). Another option is to wall off a small area with just enough room for a bed. When you are not able to keep your eyes glued on the pup (which truly is required while housetraining), the crate is a great tool to use to train the pup to hold his urine or feces for short periods of time. The key here is "short" periods of time. A simple rule of thumb is that they can hold their urine for the number of hours corresponding to their age in months, plus one. So a two month old puppy should theoretically be able to hold her urine for three hours. It would, therefore, be unwise to leave this puppy alone for more than three hours at a time.

Understanding a few other puppy traits will further arm you with the knowledge you need to be successful in housetraining your puppy (or back-slidden dog). Puppy bladders are small so taking them out frequently is a must. With this in mind, it seems perfectly logical that we should take them out every single hour to "the" desired potty patch. The best location is an area that the pup has already eliminated in. They would naturally be drawn back here by smell anyway. As for puppy bowels, there is some predictability here. They tend to need to have a bowel movement upon waking, 15-20 minutes after eating and after a bout of play. Feeding at set meal times allows you to better predict when the pup will need to go out.

Knowing all of this, we should be able to accomplish outside elimination with no problem, right? One would think so but we have to factor in the fact that puppies have the attention span of a gnat. They can be assuming the “position” only to stop in their tracks to chase down a butterfly. So, how do we keep the puppy focused? Pairing a short phrase such as “Hurry up,” or “Go potty,” with being leash walked in their potty zone will help a lot. We can re-focus their attention on the task at hand with a simple phrase.

Now for the nitty gritty of housetraining.

The first rule is **Positively reinforce desired behavior:** Simply put, this means that the puppy is lavished with praise, pets and really good treats whenever they go potty outside, preferably in the chosen “potty spot”.

Let’s break this down into smaller steps:

1. Every hour put the leash on the pup and say, “Let’s go outside” or “Let’s go potty” (or your preferred phrase).
2. Take them out to the potty spot and say, “Hurry up” or “Go potty” (or your preferred phrase). Repeat the phrase as needed to keep them focused.
3. Once they have done “the deed”, lavish them with praise, pets and treats using your best “high-pitched puppy praise voice”. We want them to think, “I really love going potty here. I get good things when I go here.”
4. Now you can interact with the pup – playing in the yard, burning off some puppy energy or going for a walk, or perhaps just lingering outside to enjoy the fresh air.
5. Be careful to not fall into the trap of quickly ushering puppy into the house after they eliminate. Look at it from their point of view. Outside they have fresh air to breathe with new smells, sights and sounds. They also get to burn off excess energy. But, if they have to go inside immediately after going potty, it won’t take them long to figure out that it’s wise to delay the potty process so as to have more time outside. Having a little play time outdoors should be part of their reward for going potty in the desired location.
6. Remember to also take them out upon waking, after playing and 15-20 minutes after eating for a bowel movement.
7. Placing a bell at dog-paw-level, right beside the door can give them a tool to later signal their need to go outside to relieve themselves. Gently take their paw and touch the bell right before going out. Get into the habit of saying, “Let’s go potty,” then ring the bell, open the door and walk them to their spot.
8. The one-hour intervals can be lengthened as they become successful at only eliminating outside.

The second rule, **Interrupt and redirect undesired behavior,** is equally important as the first rule. This rule goes into effect if we catch them in the act of eliminating indoors. Notice that the word “punish” is not in this rule. Punishment, in the form of yelling, swatting, rubbing their nose in the mistake, etc, will only serve to frighten the puppy, even causing them to fear *you*. If you become a scary, screaming banshee when they urinate in front of you indoors, what must their little brains think? What is the likelihood that they will want to eliminate in front of you again, whether it is outside or inside? Dogs, in general, learn much more quickly by redirecting undesired behavior and positively reinforcing desirable behavior. Punishment usually serves to confuse and delay learning.

Let’s break this rule down into smaller steps:

1. When you catch the pup in the act of squatting, simply interrupt the behavior with a noise that is loud enough to startle the pup and get the pup to abort the elimination process. Good startle devices include a shake can (can with pennies inside), bicycle horn, or a hand slapping a table, etc. This “startling” should be done discreetly so as not to let the pup associate “you” with the noise. We simply want the pup to stop what they are doing.
2. Then you can quickly say “Let’s go outside” in a happy voice and lead them out to their potty spot.
3. The key here is that they are interrupted from eliminating inside, *every time*, they try to go indoors. This brings us to the third essential rule; **Never Let Them Out Of Your Sight.** This allows the consistency that is needed to get the point across that *inside* is “NOT” a potty zone and that *outside* “is” the potty zone.
4. How can you catch them every time? Don’t let them out of your sight. How, you ask? Keep the pup with you at all times and keep your eye on them. A simple technique is to tie the pup to your waist with a long leash or rope. They can’t leave your sight this way. If you can’t do this all day long, simply utilize the

crate technique for the times when your attention needs to be elsewhere, such as when you are on the phone, doing laundry, changing a diaper, etc.

5. Catching the pup “in the act” is actually later than what is ideal. Instead, strive to catch the pup when they are getting ready to do “the deed”, when they are circling, sniffing, and just getting ready to squat. This will help them associate the feeling of needing to go potty with the act of actually going outside. We want them to think, “I have to pee so I better let my human know.”
6. How might they eventually let you know they have to go? They may be subtle such as those that simply look in the general direction of the door. Others may actually go over to the door or scratch at the door. Lucky is the owner of a pup that figures out to whine or bark at the door when they have to go. The “Bell Training” also gives dogs an audible signal to let you know that they have to go out.

Life wouldn't be life without a few “What if's...”

1. *What if the puppy doesn't do the deed when you take her out?*  
If you have allowed her sufficient time to go potty and she hasn't gone, simply take her back in and place her in her crate or confined area. The confinement teaches her to hold her urine or feces while indoors. Wait 10-15 minutes and take her out again. Do this repeatedly until she successfully voids outdoors. She can then be allowed some freedom when she comes back inside.

2. *What if you don't catch him “in the act” and later find a puddle on the floor?*

The first thing you should ask yourself is, “How did I let this happen?” The next task is to clean it up with a neutralizing product. What you should *not* do is punish the puppy. He will make absolutely no association between the punishment and the dirty deed. In fact, the only thing punishment will do is potentially make the puppy anxious.

3. *What if you would rather just open the back door and let the puppy out alone to eliminate and then give a treat upon their return? After all, we are all busy, right?*

Trust me when I tell you that this “hands off” approach will likely backfire. Why? Just look at it from the puppy's view point. You let her outside to go potty and she may, in fact, go potty but then she spots a grass hopper and busies herself chasing it around. Eventually she comes in and is given a treat. What has she associated the treat with? Going potty? Chasing a bug? Coming in the door? It's the latter since that is what she did just before being treated. Eventually, she may even make the trip outside a “quickie” in order to rush back in for the treat. But has she gone potty first? Maybe not. These are usually the pups/dogs that come back inside and immediately squat on the floor.

4. *What if we don't want to get up in the middle of the night to take the pup outside?*

If the pup is older, let's say 5-6 months, he should be able to hold his urine for 6-7 hours at a time – thus allowing you a good night's sleep. If, on the other hand, the puppy is only two months old, we shouldn't expect him to hold its urine for more than three hours. This means that a trip out during the night is necessary for the comfort of the pup. Be patient – the older the pup gets, the longer you can sleep at a stretch. Just remind yourself of the time and energy commitment you agreed to when you decided to get the pup.

If all goes well and as planned, your puppy/dog should be really catching on to the whole “houstraining” thing in just a few days. But don't relax and assume you are home free just yet. You'll need to stay vigilant to ensure that they *really* “get it”. But, perhaps you have done everything by the book and the puppy/dog just is not “getting it”. Toy breeds, terriers and hounds are notoriously more difficult to houstrain in general. Also, males lag behind females not only for humans being potty trained, but for canine youngsters as well. If, at some point your older puppy or dog seems to have “forgotten” the houstraining rules, rewind and start from the beginning once again. Keep in mind, though, that if a previously well houstrained mature dog (or even older pup) suddenly has accidents in the house, he/she should be tested for urinary tract problems, including an infection.

Good luck and happy housebreaking!

