

Housetraining Puppies

The Humane Society of the United States



Housetraining your puppy requires far more than a few stacks of old newspapers—it calls for vigilance, patience, plenty of commitment and above all, consistency.

By following the procedures outlined below, you can minimize house soiling incidents. Virtually every dog, especially puppies, will have an accident in the house, and more likely, several. Expect this—it's part of living with a puppy.

The more consistent you are in following the basic housetraining procedures, the faster your puppy will learn acceptable behavior. It may take several weeks to housetrain your puppy, and with some of the smaller breeds, it might take longer.

Establish a routine

Like babies, puppies do best on a regular schedule. The schedule teaches him that there are times to eat, times to play, and times to potty.

Generally speaking, a puppy can control his bladder one hour for every month of age. So if your puppy is two months old, he can hold it for about two hours. Don't go longer than this between bathroom breaks or he's guaranteed to have an accident. If you work outside the home, this means you'll have to hire a dog walker to give your puppy his breaks.

Take your puppy outside frequently—at least every two hours—and immediately after he wakes up, during and after playing, and after eating or drinking.

Pick a bathroom spot outside, and always take your puppy to that spot using a leash. While your puppy is eliminating, use a word or phrase, like "go potty," that you can eventually use before he eliminates to remind him what to do. Take him out for a longer walk or some playtime only after he has eliminated.

Reward your puppy every time he eliminates outdoors. Praise him or give him a treat—but remember to do so immediately after he's finished eliminating, not after he comes back inside the house. This step is vital, because

rewarding your dog for eliminating outdoors is the only way he'll know what's expected of him. Before rewarding him, be sure he's finished eliminating. Puppies are easily distracted. If you praise him too soon, he may forget to finish until he's back in the house.

Put your puppy on a regular feeding schedule. Do What goes into a puppy on a schedule comes out of a puppy on a schedule. Depending on their age, puppies usually need to be fed three or four times a day. Feeding your puppy at the same times each day will make it more likely that he'll eliminate at consistent times as well, and that makes housetraining easier for both of you.

Pick up your puppy's water dish about two and a half hours before bedtime to reduce the likelihood that he'll need to potty during the night. Most puppies can sleep for approximately seven hours without having to eliminate. If your puppy does wake you up in the night, don't make a big deal of it; otherwise, he will think it is time to play and won't want to go back to sleep. Turn on as few lights as possible, don't talk to or play with your puppy, take him out to do his business, and return him to his bed.

Supervise

Don't give your puppy an opportunity to soil in the house; keep an eye on him whenever he's indoors.

Tether your puppy to you or a nearby piece of furniture with a six-foot leash if you are not actively training or playing with him. Watch for signs your puppy needs to eliminate. Some signs are obvious, such as barking or scratching at the door, squatting, restlessness, sniffing around, or circling. When you see these signs, immediately grab the leash and take him outside to his bathroom spot. If he eliminates, praise him lavishly and reward him with a treat.

Keep your puppy on leash in the yard. During the housetraining process, your yard should be treated like any other room in your house. Give your puppy some freedom in the house and yard only after he is reliably housetrained.

Confinement

When you're unable to watch your puppy at all times, he should be confined to an area small enough that he won't want to eliminate there. The space should be just big enough for him to comfortably stand, lie down, and turn around in. You can use a portion of a bathroom or laundry room blocked off with baby gates.

Or you may want to crate train your puppy and use the crate to confine him. (Be sure to learn how to use a crate humanely as a method of confinement.) If your puppy has spent several hours in confinement, you'll need to take him directly to his bathroom spot as soon as you let him out, and praise him when he eliminates.

Oops!

Expect your puppy to have a few accidents in the house—it's a normal part of housetraining. Here's what to do when that happens:

Interrupt your puppy when you catch him in the act of eliminating in the house.

Make a startling noise (be careful not to scare him) or say "OUTSIDE!" Immediately take him to his bathroom spot, praise him, and give him a treat if he finishes eliminating there.

Don't punish your puppy for eliminating in the house. If you find a soiled area, it's too late to administer a correction. Just clean it up. Rubbing your puppy's nose in it, taking him to the spot and scolding him, or any

other punishment will only make him afraid of you or afraid to eliminate in your presence. In fact, punishment will often do more harm than good.

Clean the soiled area thoroughly. Puppies are highly motivated to continue soiling in areas that smell like urine or feces. Check with your veterinarian or pet store for products designed specifically to clean areas soiled by pets.

It's extremely important that you use the supervision and confinement procedures outlined above to minimize the number of accidents. If you allow your puppy to eliminate frequently in the house, he'll get confused about where he's supposed to eliminate, which will prolong the housetraining process.

When you're away

A puppy under six months of age cannot be expected to control his bladder for more than a few hours at a time (approximately one hour for each month of age). If you have to be away from home more than four or five hours a day, this may not be the best time for you to get a puppy; instead, you may want to consider an older dog, who can wait for your return.

If you already have a puppy and must be away for long periods of time, you'll need to:

Arrange for someone, such as a responsible neighbor or a professional pet sitter, to take him outside to eliminate.

Train him to eliminate in a specific place indoors. Be aware, however, that doing so can prolong the process of housetraining. Teaching your puppy to eliminate on newspaper may create a life-long surface preference, meaning that even as an adult he may eliminate on any newspaper lying around the living room.

Paper training

When your puppy must be left alone for long periods of time, confine him to an area with enough room for a sleeping space, a playing space, and a separate place to eliminate.

In the designated elimination area, use either newspapers (cover the area with several layers of newspaper) or a sod box. To make a sod box, place sod in a container such as a child's small, plastic swimming pool. You can also find dog litter products at a pet supply store.

If you clean up an accident in the house, put the soiled rags or paper towels in the designated elimination area. The smell will help your puppy recognize the area as the place where he is supposed to eliminate.