



HOUSETRAINING AND CRATETRAINING

The easiest, most efficient and most effective path to a housetrained dog is to focus on management to set him up for success. This means making sure your pup is in the right place (inside on pads or a litter box or outside on concrete or grass) at the right time (when he needs to eliminate) and rewarding him for going in the right spot.

Without a doubt, the most common mistake people make is allowing their new puppy or dog to run loose in their home before he is housetrained. It is inevitable he will eliminate in inappropriate spots and he may be punished for doing so.

A few things happen as a result of this scenario. Each time your pup eliminates in the wrong spot the habit of doing so becomes stronger and each time you reprimand your dog for doing so it is likely that you are teaching him two things; You aren't such a nice person after all, and you don't like to see him eliminate. So, the relationship between you and your dog is damaged and your dog may learn to be concerned about pottying in front of you when taken out for a walk and/or attempt to potty in private in the home (i.e. behind the couch or when you are gone). This a common outcome of punishment training; What you are punishing for is not always what the dog thinks he is being punished for, so the problem isn't resolved.

Aside from being ineffective and having negative side effects, focusing on reprimanding your dog for going in the wrong spot is very time consuming. If this method works at all, by the time it does you have spent a lot of time cleaning up mistakes and your dog has ruined your carpeting.

Tools for Effective Time Management

Instead, consider the following tools as part of a time management plan to prevent predictable mistakes and to set your dog on the path for the most efficient and effective housetraining success.

Every dog has a different metabolism and energy level, both of which affect the frequency of elimination. As a rule of thumb, very young puppies need to eliminate at least every 1-2 waking hours. They also need to go immediately after waking up or playing and about 30-60 minutes after eating or drinking. Basically, they need to go a lot!

To most accurately predict when your pup needs to eliminate, a good doggy time manager uses four tools for success:

On leash supervision

A short-term confinement

A long-term confinement

A feeding, watering, walking, and play schedule.

On Leash Supervision

Until your dog is housetrained keep him on a light 5-6 foot leash when you are spending time with him. You can:

Hold the leash in your hand.

Let the leash drag as you play with and train your pup.

Step on the end of the leash if you are seated and give your pup a chew toy.

Tether the leash to a stable object in your line of sight and give your pup a chew toy.

In all of these scenarios your pup can easily be prevented from wandering about and making mistakes, is learning to settle down quietly with a chew toy, and the leash can be used to give feedback to your pup if he nips you in play (by gently holding him at arms length for a moment before resuming an interaction). This will need to be repeated many times.

After a bit of time (dependent on your dog's age this can range from 15-60 minutes) it is likely your dog will need to eliminate. Take him to his potty spot and reward him for being an extra smart pup and going in the right place.

Some owners feel having the leash on indoors is too restrictive. But it takes only a few seconds for your pup to get into trouble. So, it is really much kinder to use the leash to help him avoid problems now so he can enjoy more freedom later.

Short-Term Confinement

Every dog needs to learn to build bladder and bowel muscle control, whether you intend for them to potty solely outdoors or both outdoors and on an indoor potty surface. The best way to do this is with the aid of a crate. Most dogs will not soil their crate if left in there for a period of time that is reasonable for their age and level of training.

The crate helps your pup learn to 'hold it' and gives you a way to very accurately predict when your pup needs to eliminate. If your pup has been napping in his crate for an hour or so, chances are he will need to eliminate when he wakes up. So, you can take him to his designated potty spot and reward him for going in the right spot.

Some people feel it is unfair to confine a dog to a crate. But, a crate is not dissimilar to a child's crib, except a crate has a top on it. Just as you would carefully and responsibly confine a child when you can't watch over them, so should you carefully and responsibly confine your puppy when you can't watch over him. When used properly a crate accelerates housetraining and therefore accelerates your dog's eventual access to safe areas of your home.

Keep in mind that while a crate is an invaluable housetraining tool it should not become a long term lifestyle for your dog. A crate is a tool that helps you keep your puppy safe and teach him the skills he needs so he may eventually enjoy freedom in the home. Neither young pups nor adult dogs should be confined to a crate all day and night.

Crate Duration Guideline

9-10 weeks Approx. 30-60 minutes (only when the puppy is sleepy)

11-14 weeks Approximately 1-2 hours

15-16 weeks Approximately 3-4 hours

17+ weeks Approximately 4+ hours (6 hours maximum)

Long Term Confinement

Very young puppies can not be expected to 'hold it' for more than a few hours. So, when you need to leave your young puppy alone for more than an hour or two, do not confine him to his crate (or he may be forced to eliminate in there). Instead, confine him to an area where he has everything he needs: a crate to sleep in, chewtoys and most importantly an indoor toilet (paper or a litter pan). A bathroom, small kitchen or an exercise pen will do. As with supervision and a crate, a long term confinement area is meant to set your dog up for success. When he is confined in this area he can't make mistakes in the home, he is safe from dangers in the home, and he learns appropriate behaviors, such as eliminating on pads and chewing his toys.

Start by covering the entire floor with pads, this way your puppy can't make any mistakes off the paper, so is set up for 100% success. After a week, leave a small section of the floor uncovered. If your pup makes even one mistake off the pads, re-cover the entire area and try again in a few days. If 90% of the floor was covered and he chose to go on the 10% that wasn't, he needs a little more time to develop a strong preference for going on pads. If he doesn't make any mistakes for a few days, uncover a bit more. Continue until you are down to a small square that is appropriate to your dog's size.

Unless you intend for your pup to be pad for life, you should keep pads down only until your dog is old enough to have sufficient control to hold it for 2-4 hours in his crate. This is usually around 4-5 months old, but depends on the individual dog and how good you have been about helping your dog build muscle control using supervision and his short term confinement area (see above).

At this point, you will no longer use the long term confinement area. Instead, confine him to his crate when you can't watch him and be sure to schedule potty breaks spaced out throughout the day based on your dog's age and temperament.

Feeding and Watering Schedule

If your puppy has unlimited access to both, chances are he will need to eliminate constantly. Make things easier on your pup by creating a food and water schedule. Provide your pup with a big bowl of water 5-6 times a day and feed him 2-3 times a day and you will have a much easier time predicting when he needs to go.

Hooray! He's Housetrained! Or is He?

Lots of puppies start getting the idea of where they should go within a few weeks of following this advice. But, things will rapidly regress if you slack off and assume your pup is completely housetrained when in reality he is just starting to understand what is expected. It is generally advised to hold off giving a dog full freedom in the house until they are at least 1-year-old. This may seem like a long time, but it is much smarter to lay a very strong housetraining foundation than to rush things along and have a 2 year-old dog who still occasionally makes mistakes in the house.

When your dog is first being expected to hold it throughout the day, don't let him roam freely throughout the house. Instead, start with very brief absences and keep him confined to one room that is as dog-proofed as possible. This way any potential mistakes are confined to one area. If he makes a mistake just take a step back and consider using more management again and an additional potty break.

Most importantly, don't forget to continue to reward your adult dog for going in the right spot. Housetraining can deteriorate at any time. Offering the occasional "What a great dog you are!" and a tasty treat for choosing the right spot is a great way to remind your dog that going in his designated doggy toilet is much more rewarding than going on the carpet.

HORRAY!

10 Easy Steps to Cratetraining

While dogs certainly are descended from den animals this doesn't mean they will immediately take to being confined to a den. So, it is a good idea to follow these steps to help your pup become gradually accustomed to his crate.

1. Chose a crate appropriate for your puppy. He should be able to stand up, turn around, lie down, shift position and stretch. However, if the crate is too large, your pup may not be as likely to curb elimination. If you have purchased a larger crate in anticipation of your puppy's adult size, consider placing dividers in it to make it temporarily smaller.
2. It is usually better not to use a dog pad or bed in the crate until your puppy is less inclined to chew it or eliminate on it and push it to the side.
3. Start by leaving the crate in the long term confinement area with the door open. Most pups will use this as their sleeping area without any prompting.
4. Turn the crate into a 'magic box.' If you were given \$500 every time you walked into a room, chances are you would want to enter the room more frequently. The same holds true for your pup, except his version of \$500 is food and toys.
5. If your pup is hesitant at first, you can encourage him to investigate the crate by putting a treat in the front half so he doesn't have to step all the way in and then gradually tossing tiny treats farther towards the back of the crate.
6. After a few sessions, try sitting in front of the crate and directing your eyes towards it. Wait to see if your pup tries walking into the crate on his own and when he does, toss a few tiny treats on the floor of the crate to reward him for a great decision.
7. The first confinement session (when you close the door) should ideally be after a period of play, exercise, and elimination (e.g., when the puppy is ready to take a nap). When your pup is in the crate, toss in a continuous stream of very tiny treats. Ignore your pup when you open the door and he steps out. Repeat this many times, gradually increasing the time when the door is closed. This way your pup learns it is more rewarding in the crate with the door closed than out of it. Be careful not to push things. A good teacher goes slowly and makes it easy on the puppy.
8. Be sure your pup always has one or two food stuffed chew toys to keep him busy when he is in his crate. After a bit of time chewing his toys or napping you can take the pup to his designated toilet and reward him with hugs, kisses and treats when he goes in the right spot.
9. For at least a month feed your dog at least one of his meals in his crate each day.
10. While most pups have a natural sense of cleanliness and will keep their sleeping place clean, that instinct can be destroyed if the pup is left in his crate when he needs to eliminate and he has not yet developed sufficient bladder and bowel muscle control. In this case he is essentially forced to soil the crate. Once the pup decides the crate is where he is supposed to eliminate you will have a much harder time housetraining. So, make a point to begin using the crate for very short periods of time and only when you are sure the pup is empty. As the pup matures you can gradually increase his time in the crate.
11. Once your dog is housetrained you do not need to confine him to his crate. However, it is advised that you have him occasionally practice his crate skills in case you need to crate him for travel, due to advise from your veterinarian related to a medical issue, or for many other reasons.

Housetraining in a Nutshell

Manage your pup's time so he is set up for housetraining success. To prevent mistakes, keep your dog on leash and by your side when he is out of his short or long term confinement areas and feed your dog on a schedule so that he is more likely to eliminate on a schedule.

Take your dog on leash to his designated potty many times throughout the day. Pace back and forth (movement promotes movement) for a maximum of 10 minutes. If he eliminates, offer lots of praise and play. If he doesn't, go indoors, hold him for 10 minutes or so and then try again. This way your dog learns to go promptly when he is taken to his potty.

Reward your dog with lots of tiny treats, and calm praise when he goes in the right spot.

Focus on rewarding elimination in the right places rather than punishing elimination in the wrong places. If a mistake happens, just clean it up and promise yourself to improve your doggy time management skills.