

HOUSE-TRAINING 101

There are four, and only four, requirements for successful housetraining, and they are probably not what you think. You will need an ex-pen and a properly fitted crate. A great deal of patience. Un-erring supervision.

We are strict believers in crate training. Your puppy, believe it or not, is also a believer in crate training. He instinctively wants a den to sleep in so the crate is not “cruel” as some people feel. The crate is meant to be a safe place, both his bed and his cave. It is not used for punishment or as a “doggy jail”.

THE EX-PEN is basically a playpen for your puppy. Just as people buy playpens for their two-legged puppies, to keep them safe from harm, it only makes sense that you should have one for your four-legged puppy. They cost anywhere from \$60 to \$100 and even have panels you can use to expand them. Not only will it limit the space they have to soil, it will keep them safe from chewing power cords, or eating other things that could be hazardous to their health. An ex-pen gives the puppy a safe, limited place to play so that they can get proper exercise. It also gives you a little piece of mind that your puppy isn't slinking off to have an accident.

A PROPERLY FITTED CRATE is one that is big enough for your puppy to stand up and turn around in. It is not a mansion, or even a condo. It should be small and cozy, and not leave enough room for him to potty in one end and sleep in another. Wire crates are the best investment, because you can buy one crate for the dog's entire life and use the enclosed divider to make it the size it needs to be as he grows. Running from about \$50 for the smallest crate and \$150 for a great dane, they also have an easy-to-clean slide out tray, and fold down quickly for travel. Plastic crates will work as well, but you will have to purchase several as your dog grows.

PATIENCE – One of the gravest mistakes new puppy owners make is having unrealistic expectations of their puppy. They want housetraining to be completed in a matter of days. They expect the dog to be able to communicate with them about when they have to go, and give themselves and their two-legged keepers plenty of time to get outside. Puppy's that are 8 – 10 weeks have almost NO warning, let alone have they figured out the proper way to get your attention. Don't expect too much from your puppy, keep their age in mind, and always always always remember that this is a learning process. Don't give up or give in.

SUPERVISION – This is probably the single-most important aspect of housetraining. You would not leave a 6 month old baby free to roam around the house willy nilly...without a diaper. You would also not get angry with said baby if he happened to soil the carpet or get into something he shouldn't have. It is your responsibility to know where your puppy is every second he is loose in the house. It is your responsibility to look for the warning signs that your puppy has to go to the bathroom and to get him outside before he makes a mistake. Your puppy is not old enough, nor does he have the reasoning skills to figure this out without you. If your puppy makes mistake after mistake in the house it is not because

he is “dumb” or willful. It is because you have failed at this very simple, but time-consuming concept.

When you first get your puppy, restrict him to the kitchen, a utility room, spare room, bathroom etc where he cannot damage carpet, furniture or anything of value. Leave the crate in a corner of the room with a couple of treats inside. Put down some potty pads or newspapers by the door. At night or when you are gone, the sound of a radio or the TV turned on softly will keep him company. Your puppy is going to whine and cry for a few days of this. He is learning to be separated from his siblings and from you. He may have never been alone before so it is a period of adjustment. And likely, it is harder on you than the puppy! The separation at this time is a very important lesson for your puppy to learn. If you take him to bed with you and give into the crying, he will get used to being with you all the time and you may have to deal with separation anxiety problems as he gets older. Separation anxiety is very difficult to eradicate once it has set in, but fairly easy to avoid at the outset.

After a few days of this, of exploring and possibly even sleeping in his crate on his own, it is time to start getting him accustomed to the door being locked for a period of time. When the puppy goes in there you can give him a kong stuffed with treats or food, a bully stick or a flossie to keep him busy. It is something tasty and exciting to keep his mind off being in his crate. It is also a special treat, one he does not get any old time. When he gets tired, he will fall asleep. At eight weeks he can sleep without needing to eliminate for three to four hours. At 12 weeks he can hold it six to eight hours and at 16 weeks he should be able to make it through the night.

PICK A SCHEDULE AND STICK TO IT!

First thing in the morning you must take your puppy outside. Carry him! He might not make it if you try to let him follow you outside. On a leash, take him to the area you want him to go, put him down and keep a slow pace until he goes. Once he does, immediately give him a treat and make a huge fuss over the good boy thing he did! Don't allow him to become too distracted, resist the urge to play with him, and don't waste your time. If he hasn't urinated and defecated within 10 minutes or so, bring him back inside and put him back in his crate. Go on with your morning routine of getting ready, and 30 minutes later take him out to try again. Within a few days he will get the idea that he is going to get a treat for eliminating completely and will go as soon as he gets outside.

Every time you take your puppy outside...if he does not potty, he goes into his crate. It is not punishment! You are simply putting him somewhere he is highly unlikely to soil to give his bladder a bit more of a chance to fill up. It is infinitely more unfair to allow your puppy free run, and then get angry at him when he makes a mistake. It's your mistake! This is where patience is so important...your puppy has a lot to learn about housetraining. He has to learn to be able to recognize a full bladder. He has to learn the proper controls in order to “hold it”. He has to learn the proper location to eliminate, and the appropriate timing. It's a lot for a little baby to take in, so don't be discouraged.

A check cord can be a valuable tool through this period. You can let your puppy be with you while you vacuum, watch tv, work on the computer, etc. A six to fifteen foot cord can be attached to this collar while he is out with you. If he starts to wander too far, just step on the end of the cord. You can even attach it to yourself. He will soon adjust to the borders to expect him to adhere to. Reward him periodically for staying with you.

Remember, housebreaking is about consistency and supervision, time and routine. It's not easy, but neither is it the hardest thing you will teach your dog.

Q: What do I do if my dog potties on the carpet in my house?

A: Your instinct is going to be driven by anger – yell, scold, rub his nose in it, and even “swatting”. The truth is, once the accident has happened, it's too late and all your anger does is satisfy YOUR need for retribution and the only lesson your dog learns is that you are unpredictable and a little bit scary. All you can do is clean up the stain with a very powerful odor removing product (we carry something called “Get Serious” that is amazing) and resolve to do a better job supervising your puppy. It's really not his accident – it's yours.

Q: I take my puppy out and stand outside for an HOUR and as soon as we come back in, he potties on the floor again! How do I stop that?

A: Your puppy is getting distracted outside, and you are allowing him to waste time. You shouldn't be pottying your dog for an hour – not even half that! Take your puppy out to the proper area and keep him moving. Keep him on a leash so he doesn't bound off to play with blowing leaves or chase a bug. Do everything you can to keep him on task. If he still doesn't go for you within 15 minutes, then the urge isn't “pressing” and he will only “remember” to go when he is suitably bored (ie back in the house). Carry him inside and return him to his crate with a chew and try again in 30 minutes. If your puppy does not go to the bathroom when he is taken outside, don't let him back in to roam around! He will have an accident!

Q: I have heard that yorkies/chihuahuas/maltese/toy poodles/etc are very hard breeds to housetrain. Is this true?

Yes and no. Despite what you've heard, housetraining has less to do with a particular breed and much more to do with the size of the dog. Little dogs are much better at sneaking away. They potty such a small amount that you don't always catch it, and they can squeeze into small spots. It is much easier to detect when your labrador is having an accident, than your toy breed. All they require is more supervision. That will keep them from “wandering off” and getting into trouble.

Q: My puppy knows when he's done something wrong by pottying on the floor. He slinks around full of guilt. If he knows he did a bad thing, why won't he stop going on the floor?

Your puppy knows that potty on the floor makes you angry. Your tone will change and

become low and perhaps menacing. You might ask "DID YOU DO THIS?" in a voice that has them willing to admit guilt to anything. What they cannot do is connect your anger to their urge to potty, they simply don't have the cognitive abilities to figure that one out. Once they've gone, they know you will get angry, but they are limited and unable to go back one more step to "see the future" and know that this action NOW will make you mad LATER.

Q: When can I expect my puppy to let me know when he has to go outside? He never lets me know when he has to go!

A: As your puppy gets older, he will be able to give you some signs that he has to go out. You can even teach your puppy to ring a bell on the door. However during training, you cannot "wait and see" if your puppy lets you know. You have to constantly and often reinforce the proper behavior. We do not consider any dog completely housetrained until he is at least 1 year old. At that point, they have the physical and mental strength they need to not only have warning that they have to go, hold it when there isn't an opportunity, and let you know that they have to go out.