



HOW DO I HOUSEBREAK MY DOG?

Most dogs can be housebroken easily if owners are consistent and persistent in training; and, crate training will simplify the process even further. Crate training* helps teach a dog the only acceptable place for elimination is outdoors. Dogs, when inside the house, are either crated or under supervised liberty until they learn the only acceptable place to eliminate is outside.

Crates are not "doggy jail cells." Most dogs come to think of their crate as "their room" and a place of retreat that gives them a sense of security. Dogs familiar with crating make better traveling companions and "kennel" more comfortably during stays at the veterinarian or at a boarding kennel, making these situations less stressful for the dog.

The basics are:

1. Owners should have reasonable expectations,
2. The dog must be taken out regularly and frequently,
3. The dog must either be crated or fully supervised at all times until fully trained, and
4. The dog should be rewarded for successes. (You must remember that punishment may cause additional housebreaking problems.)

What are reasonable expectations? The rule of thumb is that a puppy can hold its elimination needs for approximately one hour per month of age, up to a maximum of eight months/eight hours. However, the more often a dog is taken out in the early stages of housebreaking, the more effective your housebreaking efforts will be. A young puppy should be taken out frequently until it learns control. Even older dogs should be taken out frequently during housebreaking, because, although a grown dog can hold its eliminations for longer periods, it has no history of doing so and must be trained to do so.

Also, a dog's history may make it more difficult to housebreak. If a puppy or dog was kept in unclean conditions, i.e., where it urinated and defecated, prior to your obtaining it like in a puppy mill or petshop, the dog probably never learned the importance of keeping its personal areas "clean." This can make housebreaking more difficult. Of course, housebreaking older dogs or bringing an "outdoor dog" indoors, may require extra patience.

To begin housebreaking always remember that the dog should be taken straight outside immediately after EVERY period of confinement. If the dog relieves itself outside, allow it to play for up to 15 minutes in a confined area in the house under close supervision. (Watch for signs the dog has to relieve itself because 10 to 15 minutes of excitement will probably cause the dog to need to relieve itself again, if so, take it back outside.) If the dog does not relieve itself, return the dog to its kennel.

Some owners find such close supervision difficult. Yet, it is critical to your housebreaking success. Such owners may want to use an "umbilical cord." (To make an "umbilical cord," attach a leash to the dog's collar, thread a belt through the loop on the leash, and wear the belt around your waist.) This prevents the dog from wandering freely and allows an owner to supervise the dog while still having his/her hands free to do other tasks.

Dogs must be taken out soon after each feeding, usually within ten to fifteen minutes, and when they first wake up. Gradually, with age and over time, your dog will learn more control and can hold eliminations for longer periods. Then, you can reduce the number of required outings to 3 or 4 a day.

Pay close attention to your dog's behavior and you may notice that your dog gives you "signals" that it needs to go outside. These signs include circling, barking or whining, acting nervously, panting, pacing or moving toward the door.

Each time the dog is taken out of the crate, ask, "Do you have to go outside?" Immediately walk the dog straight to the door and take it outside. (Carrying a dog outside to eliminate teaches it to expect you to do so, instead encourage it to go outside on its own "paw power" to help the dog understand what the process is

about. This helps to speed up the learning process significantly. In fact, if a doggy door leads to the elimination area, most dogs, even at 6-7 weeks, will learn to go out when the urge strikes in a relatively short time. Like the old saying goes: "Nothing teaches better than experience." Even when paper training indoor dogs, it's best to encourage the dog to go to its elimination area rather than to carry it there.) Use a leash if necessary to prevent "accidents." The dog must be taken outside frequently and praised for relieving itself outside. (If the dog must be left alone for any period of time, it is best to withhold food and water for an hour or 2 prior to leaving. Of course, you should take the dog outside to relieve itself immediately prior to your departure and upon return. Do not leave food and water in the dog's crate during house training.)

When "accidents" happen, and they will, NEVER scold or punish the dog. It is acceptable to make a loud noise to distract or startle the dog but ONLY when it is actually in the process of relieving itself inside. The dog should then be taken outside immediately to an area the dog has used previously to remind it that outdoors is the only permissible place to go. (Ask your favorite pet store or veterinarian for a product to treat any "accident" spots. The product "Outright" is our personal favorite but a number of equally good products are now available. Be sure to read and follow the directions.)

Problems that may effect housebreaking: (1) Size - Small dogs "sense" of space is different than yours or a larger dog. Generally speaking, small dogs require more supervision in less space than a bigger dog might. The "umbilical cord" method described above is especially helpful when housebreaking small dogs. (2) Some dogs are submissive by nature and will urinate as you approach them. This is the dog's way of acknowledging your superiority. If your dog is "submission wetting," keep interactions very low key. Do not punish the dog for this behavior as it will only aggravate the behavior. (3) Health problems, so, especially if the problem has just started in an older dogs, you need to rule out illness. Visit a veterinarian to insure there is no physical reason causing the dog to eliminate in the house.

We offer an alternative to crating, if for any reason crating during the time it takes to house-break your dog is unacceptable to you, even though I believe crate training is the best and easiest method. I do not recommend crating as a primary or long terms means of containment for dogs.

Crate Guidelines

Crates come in plastic, metal, and material netting and are available at most pet stores and, often, at stores like Target or Walmart. A crate should be well-constructed with only enough space for the dog to rest comfortably, stand and turn around in.

Sometimes a dog, especially an older dog, may object to crating. If your dog "throws a fit" and whines or barks, start a desensitization program by slowly introducing the dog to the crate. Tie the door of the crate open so there is no possibility of the door "accidentally" shutting on the dog. The dog's food bowl should be placed as closely to the crate as the dog will go willingly. Every time the dog is fed its bowl should be moved a bit closer to the crate. Yes, you can break its food portion into several smaller portions to make this process go faster, i.e., feed the dog smaller portions 5 times a day rather than one time a day. Eventually the bowl is placed right inside the entrance of the crate. Then, slowly move the bowl to the back of the crate. If at any point the dog balks, put the bowl back where it was the previous day for a day or 2 and then start moving the bowl forward again. Do this until the food bowl is all the way in the back of the crate. Patience is the most important factor here.

When the dog is comfortably eating in the crate, close the door but do not lock it. The dog needs to learn it is not trapped in the crate because the door shuts. The dog should be able to nudge the door open and get out easily. Eventually, lock the door for brief periods with the dog in the crate while you give the dog treats. Increase the amount of time the dog stays in the crate slowly.

HINT: NEVER OPEN THE CRATE DOOR IF THE DOG IS WHINING OR BARKING, it will teach the dog to do so continually in the hope of getting out of the kennel.