

Housebreaking a Puppy? 7 Tips from a Trainer

BY MIKKEL BECKER | JANUARY 20, 2017

If you've just brought home a new puppy, potty training is probably one of the first tasks on your list.

Unfortunately, puppies aren't born knowing that eliminating inside the house is wrong. It looks like a safe and convenient place to them! The key is to have patience and understand that each puppy picks up on the housebreaking process at his or her own pace

How to Teach Your Puppy to Potty

1. Start With a Crate Instead of giving your puppy full run of the house, limit him to areas where you can observe him at all times or keep him at your side on a 4- to 6-foot leash. When you can't watch him, make him comfortable in a crate, where he has just enough room to turn around and lie down. Since dogs innately want to keep their own space clean, he'll have an incentive to wait to go outside. Provide treats and puppy-safe toys so your puppy associates the crate with positive rewards.

2. Follow the 15-Minute Rule

Stay on top of your puppy's schedule. Puppies are most likely to need to go to the bathroom within 15 minutes of eating, drinking, playing, exercising or waking up from a nap. After any of these activities, you should give your pup a chance to go to the bathroom. As a rule of thumb, puppies can hold their bladders one hour for every month of age, plus one. So, if your puppy is 2 months old, he can usually wait up to three hours. But this varies from dog to dog, and a puppy should be taken out more frequently than his maximum hold time. If he seems to be having trouble holding it in for a reasonable amount of time for his age, consult your veterinarian.

3. Reward for a Job Well Done When your puppy gets it right, let him know it! Each time your puppy needs a bathroom break, take him outside to the same elimination area. If he does his business within five minutes, immediately praise him and give him treats. Don't put him back in his crate right away because that can feel like punishment to him. Instead, give him a 10-minute playtime in a larger supervised area. If your puppy does not go to the bathroom outside, calmly place him back in his confinement area. Give it 15 minutes, then try taking him to his outdoor elimination area again.

4. Accidents Happen Puppies are still learning, and there will be accidents. Never punish your puppy for accidentally going in the house. That will only teach the puppy to fear the idea of eliminating when people are around — and he'll likely still go in the house, when you're not looking. If you catch him in the act, interrupt him with an "oops" and bring him to the proper elimination area outside. Have supplies ready to clean up after him if he goes indoors, including an enzymatic cleaner so you can remove the smell and avoid the possibility he'll sniff out the spot in question and go there again.

5. Expand Space Gradually Once your puppy is staying accident-free in the confined area, you can gradually expand his space privileges by introducing him to a new room in your home. If he goes another week without accidents in the new space, you can introduce him to the next room. If he starts having accidents again, return to confining him to spaces where he was successful. Keep to his regular schedule and rewards for doing the right thing throughout the housebreaking process.

6. Get Out of Bed You may need to get up out of bed and take your puppy outside multiple times during the night. Don't push him to hold his bladder past his age or ability. If he does have accidents overnight, it's a clear signal that you will have to take him out more often. Although dogs want to keep their personal area clean, the more he gets used to having messes there, the more comfortable he'll become with it — and that will make your housebreaking job that much harder.

7. Skip Puppy Pads and Newspapers Although it is possible to transition dogs away from them, using puppy pads or newspapers to designate an accepted elimination area can make the housetraining process more complicated. I often work with dogs who were trained to go on pads as puppies but became confused when they weren't allowed to do so as adults. Commit to taking your puppy to an outside elimination area from the very start.