

Housebreaking

By Martin Deeley and Pat Trichter

There is no doubt that the most important lesson most owners want to teach their pup in the very beginning is to go outside to urinate and defecate. Too often, owners approach this incorrectly and in doing so create problems which can last for many months, if not years. Some dogs learn to go outside very quickly, while others need more time and patience--there is no set timescale. In some instances, certain breeds do learn quicker than others, but regardless of which breed, successful housebreaking is dependent upon the owner and management of the puppy.

Physiologically, your puppy will have problems with good bladder and sphincter muscle control until it is about sixteen weeks old. Until this age, its elimination responses are basically automatic. When it needs to eliminate, it has to eliminate, like a child in diapers--it cannot "hold on." Eating and drinking will naturally stimulate the digestive and urinary tract system but so do walking and playing. During the first weeks of owning a puppy, you need to be observant and have a lot of patience. To minimize accidents, a crate can be used to put pup in when you cannot watch or supervise, and although many owners think of the crate as being unfair ("locking the pup behind bars"), a crate can become a very comfortable place for the dog--not only during puppyhood, but for the rest of its life. Most dogs consider the crate their own little "den."

Your pup will need to eliminate quite frequently up until it is about sixteen weeks old. If it has an accident, usually it is because you have not been attentive enough. However, should pup be urinating small amounts very regularly (two or three small amounts instead of one long stream), and never seems to empty itself, then a visit to your vet is advised as this could be an indication of a urinary tract infection. Young pups have an immature immune system. They can be prone to such problems and you may be blaming them for accidents which are well beyond their control.

There are three basic steps in Housebreaking:

1. TEACH PUP TO HEAD FOR THE DOOR AND GO OUTSIDE.

When you take pup out of the crate or you want it to go outside to the bathroom, ask "Do you want to go Outside," emphasizing the word "Outside." Periodically (every five seconds) repeat the word "Outside" all the time you are walking towards the door. It is better if you use the same door each time. Be sure to rattle the door knob when you turn it and again say "Outside." Repeat the word "Outside" once more as you walk



through the threshold of the doorway. (If your pup is unwilling to follow you, slip the pup on a leash and lead it to the backdoor and then outside to the area you want it to eliminate.)

2. TEACH PUP TO ELIMINATE ON COMMAND

Select a spot in your yard where you want your pup to regularly go and consistently take it to this area. Now give the pup a cue (command) like “Get Busy” to eliminate the moment you get to the chosen area. When pup starts to sniff, it is looking for a good scent, a ‘trigger’ spot which will initiate the elimination. Again say the cue word. Pup however may take a little time to ‘investigate’ and wander about before finding the right place. So every five seconds say the cue word and if pup starts to squat repeat the instant it does so.

3. ACKNOWLEDGE THE BEHAVIOR BEFORE PUP STEPS AWAY

Praise with a calm voice very gently and only once the moment pup squats. No puppy will squat without eliminating (unless it has a urinary tract problem). Do not over-praise or you will distract pup and may have an accident when you return to the house. Wait until pup has completely finished urinating or defecating and then praise with more enthusiasm. If pup has only urinated always give it time to defecate also, repeating the process. By observing its body movements and ways, you will learn in time when pup is thinking about either urination or defecation.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Do not punish pup in any way after the fact. If an accident occurs, take pup outside and then clean up the mess without pup watching.
- If you see pup beginning to squat indoors, or even look as though it is contemplating a "spot," distract pup with a sharp “Outside” and either carry or encourage pup to the outside door. Do not punish the pup, as it is your fault. Once you are in the outside elimination area, encourage pup, “Get Busy” and praise when successful.
- Don’t play with pup when you initially take it out. Encourage it to eliminate first. Even if you are going for a walk, always take pup to the garden or yard elimination area first and make sure it relieves itself there before going out on the streets. Always clean up immediately after your dog



has eliminated. And always take a plastic bag with you on your walk to pick up any poop should the need arise.

- Always save the big praise until the pup has finished and has stepped away.
- There is no need to treat or pet or touch your pup to let him know he has pleased you. Pour on the verbal praise and it will come looking for more.
- Feed your pup on a routine time schedule which will allow you to observe and learn your pup's elimination schedule. Go outside with your pup. Do not assume that because it went into the yard it eliminated.
- If pup is taken out regularly, water is better left outside as this will encourage pup to ask you to go outside when it needs a drink and therefore learn to ask to go outside to eliminate also. Always allow it to drink freely when it goes out.
- Pup will usually need to eliminate immediately upon waking, within ten to twenty minutes of feeding, within ten to twenty minutes of drinking water, within ten to twenty minutes of running and playing, and before putting to bed for the evening.
- If pup consistently needs to go out during the night, then it is a good idea to remove all water from 7:00 pm onwards, providing pup was allowed a drink at that time and dinner was given before this time.
- If accidents occur, clean with an 'enzyme neutralizer' or a mixture of 25% white vinegar/75% water which will eliminate any 'trigger' scents from your home.
- If accidents occur too frequently, it is either bad management on your part, or a health problem. Do not hesitate to contact your vet if you suspect health irregularities. If it is determined not to be a health problem then call an IACP Member for an appointment.

SUBMISSIVE AND EXCITEABLE URINATION

Many young pups can often urinate in their excitement or through mild subordination when they greet you or meet someone new. In some instances they will grow out of this as they gain confidence and learn to control their muscles. However, the best policy is to avoid the situation occurring and play down the greeting of new people and yourself on your return home. If pup is in a crate, do not open and make a big show immediately. In fact do not make a show at all. Take a few minutes to take your coat off and put down your belongings. Don't say anything to pup, maybe a wave of the hand as you walk past. Then without a word go and slowly open the crate and immediately say quietly "outside," taking pup to the door. Once outside do not excite, greet or distract pup until it has urinated. With a pup of this nature the best policy is

always calmness, an acted out ‘ignoring’ of the pup until it has been outside and eliminated. If it is not expecting a big greeting or someone to overwhelm it, then it will not become as excited and the inappropriate urination should stop. Submissive urination can be caused by many factors, and if it does not stop within two weeks, a call to an IACP Member and a consultation will help you bring about the desired results.

A dog is either housebroken or it is not. Occasional urination and defecation as the dog gets older is not acceptable (unless medically ill) and needs to be analyzed to understand why this may be happening. Health reasons are the first ones to check, but in many instances it is bad management on the part of the owner or inappropriate correction of the dog in the early days of puppyhood. Dogs do not understand why you are punishing them if they were not corrected as it happened; all they do is read your body language.

When your body language is exhibiting anger and the dog shows fear, owners incorrectly interpret this as remorse for their actions. In these cases, dogs may refuse to eliminate in front of you and also learn to foul where perhaps you may not find it—which of course you do! However if you start correctly with housetraining as outlined in this handout, in most instances, there is an easy transition to a clean dog that you will find a delight to own. And remember: your veterinarian and an IACP Member are always there as your first source of professional advice.

Martin Deeley - IACP CDT, CDTA and PDTI

Co-Founder IACP

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