

Housebreaking and Training

The importance of acceptable behaviour

The Need for Training

It is important that your puppy learn early on what is considered acceptable behavior in your home. Failure to teach your dog the rules of the house when he is young can result in an unmanageable grown dog.

If you expect your puppy to sleep in a dog bed or crate, make sure you enforce that behavior from day one. Your puppy might cry in response to separation from mother or littermates. A hot water bottle, an old alarm clock (which imitates mom's heartbeat) and a lot of tender loving care should provide some comfort. Be sure the bed or crate is located in a warm area free of drafts.

Some people do not mind having their dog on the couch. For other people, a pet on the furniture would be an intolerable nuisance. Decide now what your household policy will be and enforce this from the start.

The same holds true for begging at the table, jumping on people, and other objectionable behaviors. If you don't want your puppy to learn any of these habits, make sure your rules are obeyed from the beginning.

Housebreaking: the Best Method

Teaching your puppy where you expect him or her to go to the bathroom is probably the most critical part of training. A dog that is not properly housebroken frequently ends up relegated to the backyard or the animal shelter.

The best and most reliable way to house train your puppy is to provide frequent opportunity to eliminate in an appropriate place and to reward this behavior immediately as it occurs. To do this, walk your puppy on a leash at regular intervals (at least every 2-3 hours).

The direct house-training method requires you to be nearby and to start good lifetime habits from the beginning. Other methods may seem easier and may appear to demand less initial investment of time. The direct training method, however, is sure to save you time and energy in the long run.

Puppies require more frequent walks until they are able to reliably control sphincters. This usually occurs by five months of age. The best method of house training is to take your puppy out within several minutes after each meal, after each nap, and after playing. These are predictable moments during the day when bowel and bladder are most full.

A wave of rhythmic contractions along the length of the digestive tract (the gastrocolic reflex) begins when food or water is swallowed. The contractions are particularly strong after eating, which explains why a bowel movement is so likely after a puppy eats. Feed your puppy at scheduled mealtimes and avoid snacks between feedings. The gastrocolic reflex may be conditioned by feeding your puppy at regular intervals.

Allowing your puppy continuous access to food or water makes house training more difficult. Prevent "accidents" between meals by taking your pup out before the accidents occur.

It is best to leash walk your puppy within 15 minutes or sooner after each meal. Take him out to the same spot each time. If your puppy is too young to walk on a leash, carry him outside to an enclosed, safe area. Stay nearby and play with or pet him. If your pup is slow adjusting to leash walks, be patient. Avoid pulling the leash and allow your pup to take his time.

If your pup is initially afraid of the leash, leave the leash on indoors for brief periods without holding onto it. When the pup becomes more accustomed to the collar and leash, take the pup for brief leash walks indoors before graduating to walks outside. Daily leash walks throughout a dog's life help maintain good elimination habits.

When the pup prepares to eliminate, begin using a key word or phrase which he will soon associate with elimination (like "hurry up" or "do it"). Use a happy and light tone of voice. This teaches the pup to void on command so that you won't freeze unnecessarily on a cold winter night while the pup leisurely looks for just the right spot. Praise immediately once the task is completed. Immediate encouragement is necessary for your pup to associate praise with elimination outside.

Paper Training: forget it !

Paper training is not a good housebreaking method contrary to popular opinion. Paper training encourages the pup to eliminate on newspapers spread over the floor in a designated area of the home. This can lead to several problems. The first is that you may confuse your pup by teaching him twice what he need learn only once. When, and if, the pup has learned to void on the newspapers, he must then be retrained to eliminate outside.

The second problem with paper training is that you may unintentionally teach your pup that it is acceptable to eliminate inside your home. Though some puppies stay on the paper, many more "miss" the boundaries set for them. You may think your pup clearly understands that he should void on paper. Instead, he may learn that it is acceptable to eliminate anywhere in that room and may begin soiling in a variety of unacceptable areas in your home.

Crate Training

Crate training is the easiest and most effective method of housetraining. In addition, it teaches your dog that the crate is his special place away from any stress present in the "outside world". The crate-trained dog tends to be more secure and have fewer behavior problems later in life.

Begin by selecting a crate that will accommodate your dog at his anticipated adult size. Your (adult) dog should be able to comfortably stand and turn to change positions in his crate. If you are purchasing a crate for a large-breed pup, you may decide to obtain several crates of different sizes to accommodate your growing pet. If you decide to purchase just the one for his adult size, you may partition the unused space and enlarge the available space as the young dog grows. Consult with us about your dog's projected size.

To introduce your dog to the crate, associate the crate with positive things, such as food and safe shelter. Leave the door open until there is no sign of fear. Cover a section of the floor with comfortable and easily laundered bedding, such as a fleecy mat or blanket. Play with your pup, tossing favorite toys and treats into the crate. Say "crate" or some other word for the puppy to begin associate with going to bed.

Place food and water in the crate to encourage your pet to consider it a safe place. This also decreases the likelihood that your dog will soil inside the cage. When the puppy enters the crate without hesitation at meal time, gently close the door while he eats. Keep the door closed for gradually longer periods. Let the pup out when he is calm and quiet. Eventually you will be able to leave your puppy in the crate for up to four hours, but no longer except at night.

Never let your puppy out of the crate for whining, barking or scratching at the door-this will teach him a bad habit. Only let your puppy out when he is quiet and calm.

Immediately after opening the crate, carry your puppy directly outside to the area you want to be used as the bathroom, and set him down. In all likelihood he will go to the bathroom right away. Praise him lavishly.

The crate is your dog's special place where he must never be disturbed or threatened. The crate must not be linked with punishment or your dog will avoid it. Encourage him to use the crate as a resting place. When the pup is ready to nap, place him in the crate with a favorite toy or treat. Never place your pup in the crate or try to remove it from the crate when you are angry. Do not reach in and pull your dog out of his crate.

Some pups do not tolerate crate training initially, becoming very agitated and excessively vocal for long periods of time. If the pup objects to being closed in the crate, you will encourage undesirable attention-seeking behavior, such as whining or barking, by visiting or otherwise comforting the crated pup. Wait a few moments until he is quiet and calm before checking that all is well. This way, you will not encourage undesirable behavior

nor will you defeat the potential usefulness of the crate. If your puppy's objections seem excessive or unacceptable to you, the direct training method may be preferable and crate training should be temporarily abandoned.

It is pointless to punish your dog at any age for "accidents" that occur in your home which you do not witness. To be effective, punishment (and praise, for that matter) must closely follow your pet's action. Punishment is ineffective unless it is given immediately (within 3 seconds) after the "crime." No matter how frustrated you may be, clean up the mess and concentrate on the steps to prevent another one.

The 'Leash or Umbilical Cord' Method

This method of house training is best used with the other techniques detailed above. Attach your pup to a long leash that is tied to your wrist or waist. This allows him a certain amount of freedom while ensuring your constant supervision. The pup cannot wander away to have an undetected "accident" and you can anticipate the pup's need to void, taking him directly outside.

This method may be applied as an alternative to overnight crate confinement or isolation in another part of your home. The pup may be leashed to your bed overnight. While some puppies may have "accidents" where they sleep, they may be less anxious when their owners are nearby, and this may positively affect their behavior.

You can also let your pup sleep in his crate near your bed (the first night), and each night you will move the crate away (a few feet) up to the place you have selected for it.