



Royal Animal Hospital – Happy Housebreaking! (Puppies and Adults)

This method of housebreaking is focused on preventing "accidents" instead of waiting for accidents to happen. The goal is to make it easy for the puppy to do the right thing in the first place. Training in this way is faster and more effective than punishing the dog for mistakes. YOU play the most important part in the success or failure of this method - you must be patient, determined and reliable for it to work. If you already own an adult dog with housebreaking problems, you can use this method to start fresh just as you would with a puppy.

This method also requires the use of a dog crate or at least, a small, confined area for the pup to stay in when he can't be supervised. A crate isn't cruel. It's your dog's own private room where he can rest and stay safe, secure and out of trouble. Just like a small child, your puppy needs to be protected from hurting himself and destroying your furniture. A crate will make the job so much easier.

The first few weeks of owning a puppy are some of the hardest and most important. Spending extra time and effort now will pay off in a big way. Don't blame the puppy if you're lazy.

Before you start, here are some essential housebreaking facts:

1. Adult dogs can be housebroken in the same way as puppies.
2. Puppies have limited bladder control.
3. Dogs & puppies like to be clean and to sleep in a clean area.
4. All dogs do best when kept to a routine schedule.
5. Dogs have to relieve themselves when...
 - they wake up in the morning or after a nap
 - within 1/2 hour after eating
 - before they go to sleep

If a dog and especially a puppy is not allowed to relieve itself at those times, it will most likely have an accident. Don't wait for the dog to "tell" you that it has to go out. Just assume that he does and put him outside.

Housebreaking Young Puppies

Puppies, under 3 months of age, have limited bladder control and reflexes. They usually don't know they're going to "go" until the moment they do! It's not realistic to expect them to tell you ahead of time. If you're observant, you'll see that a puppy who's looking for a place to go will suddenly circle about while sniffing the floor. The sniffing is instinct - he's looking for a place that's already been used. If he can't find one, he'll start one! By preventing accidents in the house, you'll teach him that the only appropriate bathroom is the one outside.

Ideally, you're reading this before you've brought your new puppy home. If you already have your puppy, just pick up the schedule at an appropriate place.

Set up a dog crate or small, confined area (the smaller the better). Using a dog crate will be more effective. The size of the crate is important - if it's too large, the puppy will have room to use one end as a bathroom. If you've bought a crate for him to "grow into", you can also get dividers to reduce the inner space while he's small. If he must be left alone while you're at work, then a larger crate is okay. Put a stack of newspapers at one end for him to use when you can't be home to let him out.

Also in the crate should be a water dish (you can get one that attaches to the side of the crate and is harder to spill), sleeping pad and toys. Put the crate where he isn't shut away from the family. If you're using a confined area instead, a baby gate across the doorway is preferable to closing the door and isolating your puppy.

Your puppy might not like the crate at first, but don't give in to his complaining or tantrums. If you're sure he isn't hungry or has to relieve himself, ignore his yowling. Eventually he'll settle down and sleep which is what crates are for. If you give a tempting treat every time you put the dog in his crate, he'll soon look forward to going in.

The crate is intended to be his sleeping and feeding place and is where he should be when you can't keep a close eye on him. If you give him the run of the house at this age, you must expect accidents. Dogs instinctively keep their sleeping areas clean. If you've allowed him to relieve himself when he needs to, he won't dirty his crate if he can help it. Once he's developed better control, he won't need the newspapers unless you're going to be gone all day. Change the papers several times a day if they've been soiled.

Puppy's First Night Home

Get off on the right foot at the beginning. Carry the puppy from your car to the yard. Set him on the grass and let him stay there until he urinates or defecates. When he does, tell him how wonderful he is. After bringing the pup inside, you can play with him for an hour. Plan on taking the puppy outside every two hours (at least) while he's awake. Don't wait for him to tell you that he has to go.



Feed the puppy his supper in his crate. Don't let him out for half an hour and when you do, carry him outside before you do anything else. Wait for him to have a bowel movement before bringing him back in. Some pups get their jobs done quickly; others may take half an hour. If he's being slow, walk around the yard encouraging him to follow you. Walking tends to get things moving, so to speak.

Always take the puppy outside first thing when you let him out of the crate and always CARRY the puppy to the door. This is important. Puppies seem to have a reflex peeing action that takes affect the moment they step out of the crate onto your carpeting. If you let him walk to the door, he'll probably

have an accident before he gets there. Part of this training method is psychological - you want the puppy to feel grass or sand under his feet when he goes to the bathroom, not your carpeting.

After another short play period, take the pup outside before bedtime and then tuck him into his crate for the night. If he cries during the night, he probably has to go out. Carry him outside, and then put him back in the crate with a minimum of cuddling. If you play with him, he might decide he doesn't want to go back to sleep. Puppies usually sleep through the night within a few days.

Daytime Schedule

Establish a regular schedule of toilet trips and feedings. This helps you to control the times he has to go out and prevent accidents in the house. First thing in the morning - before you have your coffee – carry the puppy outside. He can then come in and play for an hour. Feed breakfast in the crate and don't let him out again for 1/2 hour. Then carry him back outside for toilet. Puppies usually have a bowel movement after each meal so give him time to accomplish it.

Now he can have another inside playtime for an hour or so. Don't give him free run of the house, use baby gates or close doors to keep him out of rooms he shouldn't go in. (Puppies are notorious for finding out-of-the-way corners to have accidents in. Keep him in an area where you can watch him). If you give him too much freedom too soon, he'll probably make a mistake. After playtime, take him outside again then tuck him into his crate for a nap.

For the first month or so, you'll be feeding 3-4 meals per day. Repeat the same procedure throughout the day: The daily schedule might be toilet trip 1st thing in the morning, 1 hour playtime, toilet, meal in crate, toilet, playtime, toilet, nap, toilet, playtime, meal, etc. The playtimes can be lengthened as the puppy gets older and is more reliable. Eventually the puppy will be letting you know when he needs to go out but remember - if you ignore his request or don't move quickly he'll have an accident.

I know this sounds like a lot of work and it is. The results of all this running in and out will pay off in a well-housebroken puppy and clean carpets. Keep in mind that some breeds are easier to housebreak than others and that how the puppy was raised before it came to you has an influence too. Pet store puppies who were allowed to use wire-bottom crates have less inclination to keep their crates clean. Puppies that were raised in garages or other large areas where they could "go" wherever will also be a little more difficult. Don't give up though - you can train them, it will just take a little longer.

A word about paper-training: It seems harmless to leave papers about "just in case" and for us who work all day, it's a necessity. However, paper-training your pup will make the overall job of housebreaking that much harder and take longer. By only allowing the pup to relieve itself outside, you're teaching it that it's not acceptable to use the house. Using newspapers will override this training. Also, be aware that many puppies get the notion that going NEAR the papers is as good as going ON them. If you must use newspapers when you're gone, keep to the regular housebreaking schedule when you're at home. Get the puppy outside often enough and don't leave papers out "just in case".

Keep your dog's yard picked up and free of old stools. Many dogs choose an area to use as a bathroom. If left to become filthy, they'll refuse to use it and do their business in the house instead! If your dog has to be tied up when he's outside, keeping the area clean is even more critical. If you could only move about in a small area, you wouldn't want to lie next to the toilet, would you? Picking up stools helps you keep tabs on your dog's health as well. Stools should be firm and fairly dry. Loose, sloppy stools can be an indication of worms, health problems, stress or digestive upset.

Housebreaking Older Dogs

You can use a modified puppy schedule to train an unhousebroken dog or one that's having housebreaking problems. Start from the beginning just like a puppy, use a crate and put them on a schedule. An older dog can be expected to control itself for longer periods provided you take it outside at critical times - 1st thing in the morning, after meals and last thing at night. Until they're reliable, get them outside every 3-4 hours in between those times. Adopted older dogs that have always had freedom may be unwilling to have a bowel movement when on a leash. You can either walk them longer or keep them confined until they really must go. Just like a puppy, don't give them the run of the house. Keep them in a crate or small area if you can't supervise them. You can give them more freedom as they become more reliable.



What to do if the puppy has an accident

Remember, this method of housebreaking is based on PREVENTING accidents. By faithfully taking the dog out often enough, you'll get faster results than if you discipline the puppy after the accident has already happened. If you puppy makes a mistake because you didn't get him out when you should have - it's not his fault.

If you catch the pup in the act, stay calm. Try to distract him and scoop the puppy up immediately - don't wait for him to stop piddling – and carry him outside to an area he's used before. Set him on the ground and praise him as he finishes the job. Leave him out a few more minutes to make sure he's done before bringing him back in.

This is a little trickier with an adult dog especially if he's new to you and you don't know how he'll react to being grabbed and thrust outside. Distract him and put a leash on to take him out and show him where the bathroom is. Make a point of getting the dog out more often in the future!

ANY other corrections such as rubbing his nose in it, smacking with newspapers, yelling, beating or slapping only confuse and scare the dog. If you come across an "old" accident, it really doesn't pay to get too excited about it. Dogs aren't smart enough to connect a past act with your present anger and he won't understand what you're so mad about. If he looks 'guilty' it is just his reaction to you being angry. He has no real idea why.

Keep in mind that health problems, changes in diet and emotional upsets (moving to a new home, adding a new pet or family member, etc.) can cause temporary lapses in housetraining. Diabetes in adult dogs and urinary tract infections in both puppies and adults can cause dogs to have to urinate more often. Urinary infections in young female puppies are common. A symptom is frequent squatting with little urine release. If you suspect a physical problem, please take your dog for an examination.

Sudden changes in dog food brands or overindulgence in treats or table scraps can cause diarrhea. Dogs don't need much variety in their diets so you're not harming yours by staying to one brand of food. If you make a change, do it gradually by mixing a little of the new food with the old, gradually increasing

the amount of new food every day. A sudden change of water can cause digestive upset, too. If you're moving or traveling, take along a couple gallons of "home" water to mix with the new. Distilled water from the grocery store can also be used.

Cleaning up accidents

If you've worked hard with this training method, you won't have many. Put your puppy (or adult dog) away out of sight while you clean up a puddle. Dog mothers clean up after their babies but you don't want your puppy to think that YOU do, too! Clean up on linoleum or tiled floors is easy. On carpeting, get lots of paper towel and continue blotting with fresh paper until you've lifted as much liquid as possible.



There are several commercially available "odor killers" that are helpful. (Don't use a cleaner with ammonia - it'll make it worse). A diarrhea stain on carpeting or upholstery can be lifted with a gentle solution of lukewarm water, dishwashing soap and white vinegar.

Puppies are attracted to urine odors and their noses are much better than ours. Even when using a commercial odor killer, a teeny residue will be left behind that our dogs can smell. Keep an eye on that spot in the future! This remarkable scenting ability does have an advantage - if you must paper-train your dog and he doesn't know what newspapers are for yet, "house-breaking pads" are available at your pet store. Treated with a mild attractive odor (too weak for us to smell), your puppy will gladly use them.

Advice for owners of male dogs

Your male puppy will begin to lift his leg between 4-9 months of age. It signals the activation of his sexual drive and instinct to "mark" territory. This is a perfect age to neuter your dog and avoid the unwanted behaviors that accompany sexual maturity - marking in inappropriate places, fighting and aggression toward other male dogs.

Intact (un-neutered) males will mark any upright object and are especially hard on your shrubbery and trees. Some males will also mark inside the house, particularly if another dog comes to visit or if you're visiting in someone else's home. If you use your male for breeding, you can expect this behavior to get worse. Neutering your dog will protect his health, help him to live longer and be a better pet along with improving his house manners.