

# HOUSETRAINING YOUR PUPPY

## YOUR TWO MAIN GOALS

As you start to teach your puppy when and where to eliminate, you'll need to focus on two things:

- Preventing mistakes from happening
- Providing plenty of opportunities for success (i.e., eliminating outside) and rewarding your puppy every time she gets it right

If you carefully manage your puppy's behavior inside your home from the very beginning *and* you make it very clear that you LOVE it when she goes to the bathroom outside by rewarding her generously with treats and praise, you'll have a housetrained puppy before you know it.

## AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION IS WORTH A POUND OF CURE—SERIOUSLY.

Why is preventing mistakes essential in the beginning? It's extremely important to make sure that your puppy doesn't get into the habit of eliminating in an inappropriate place—like on your lovely Persian rug. Once she has eliminated on it a few times, to her, it's going to start smelling and feeling like "The Right Place to Go." If you spend some extra time and energy on preventing mistakes in the early stages of housetraining, you'll succeed much sooner.

## THE GREAT CRATE

The easiest way to prevent your puppy from making mistakes is to use a crate. Remember that dogs' ancestors lived in dens; dogs naturally tend to like small, cozy places to call their own. (Please see our handout, *Crate Training Your Dog*, for detailed information about how to acclimate your puppy to her crate.) Unless they've been forced to live and eliminate in very small, confined spaces, most dogs will avoid urinating and defecating where they sleep, eat and hang out. If you set up an appropriately sized crate for your new puppy, she probably won't go to the bathroom when she's in it. The crate should be big enough for your puppy to turn around, lie down and sit comfortably when she's inside it—but no bigger. You can buy a crate big enough for your puppy to use as an adult, but make it temporarily smaller when she's young by using a crate divider (some crates come with these), a large box or pegboard.

Once you've set up your puppy's crate and introduced her to it, you can make a new rule: *When you can't keep your eyes on your puppy to supervise her closely and make sure she doesn't eliminate in the house, she ALWAYS goes into her crate.* Stick to this new rule faithfully for at least a few weeks. Make sure that your pup never has the freedom to wander around your home alone. Until you're sure she's totally housetrained, she should always be in the same room as you, directly supervised or in her crate. Of course, make sure your puppy gets frequent playtime with you outside of her crate. (A perfect time for an out-of-the-crate play session: right after she's eliminated, and she's empty.) During supervised playtime, keep your eyes on your puppy vigilantly, watching for signs that she may need to go out, like sniffing, circling, pacing, whining and standing near doors.

If you choose not to use a crate to housetrain, you'll need to set up a safe, puppy-proofed confinement area instead, where your puppy can stay when you cannot supervise her. Make sure the area you choose is carpet-free, as small as possible and securely sectioned off from the rest of your house with doors, baby gates or an exercise pen.

## HOW OFTEN DOES MY PUPPY NEED TO GO?

You'll find some very general guidelines below. Keep in mind, however, that puppies are individuals, and some may develop bladder and bowel control more quickly than others. If your puppy is making mistakes in the house, she may not be physically able to hold it as long as you're asking her to.

- 8 to 12 weeks old: Your puppy will probably need to go out every 1 to 3 hours, but some may need to eliminate as often as a few times an hour until they develop bladder/bowel control.
- 12 weeks to 6 months old: Your puppy will probably need to go out every 3 to 6 hours.
- 6 months old and up: Your puppy will probably need to go out every 6 to 8 hours.

It's helpful to know that puppies usually need to eliminate at certain times. Be sure to take yours out:

- immediately after waking in the morning, waking from naps and time in the crate
- 1 to 10 minutes after eating or drinking
- right after a vigorous play session
- right before bedtime

If you can't take your puppy out often enough, consider coming home from work during lunch, asking a friend or relative to let your puppy out for you or hiring a dog walker to come over while you're away. If no one is available to take your puppy out during the day, you'll need to leave her in a confined space with some newspaper or puppy pads.

## SEND A CLEAR MESSAGE WITH REWARDS

Along with preventing your puppy from eliminating where you don't want her to, you'll need to clearly explain to her where you DO want her to go. Rewarding her with lots of praise and treats when she gets it right is the best way to accomplish this. To avoid interrupting your puppy as she's eliminating, praise her calmly when she starts to go. Then praise enthusiastically and reward her with a tasty food treat right after she finishes. Do this until your puppy is completely housetrained. Once she has been totally housetrained for about a month (no mistakes in the house at all), you can stop delivering treats and just praise her instead.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOUR PUPPY HAS AN ACCIDENT IN THE HOUSE

Although you'll housetrain your puppy more quickly if you can prevent mistakes altogether, sometimes mistakes do happen. If your puppy does eliminate in the house, here's what you need to do:

- First of all, make a mental note: Your puppy may need more frequent opportunities to go out and relieve herself, and she may need more supervision too.
- If you catch your puppy as she STARTS to make a mistake in the house, interrupt her ("Oops! Let's go outside!") and immediately take her out. If she finishes outside, be sure to praise her.
- Avoid frightening or punishing your puppy. If you do, she may learn to avoid eliminating in front of you at all—and to sneak away whenever she has to go.
- If you don't catch your puppy in the act, it is too late to respond. DO NOT punish her by yelling or rubbing her nose in urine or feces. If you do punish her, your puppy will not make the connection and understand that she shouldn't eliminate in the house. Just supervise more closely in the future.
- Clean up the accident with an enzymatic cleaner, like Nature's Miracle, which you can find at almost any pet store. If you use something else to clean up the mess, your puppy's powerful nose will still be able to smell the spot later on, and that may cue her to eliminate there again.

## INCREASING FREEDOM

When your puppy hasn't had any mistakes in the house for at least a month or two and she's consistently eliminating outside, you can start to increase her freedom in the house. Every few days, you can make her

roaming area a bit bigger, one room at a time. If you start to increase your puppy's freedom and she makes a mistake inside, you've probably progressed a bit too quickly. Go back to strict supervision for a while.

### A FEW FINAL TIPS

- Provide very frequent opportunities for your puppy to eliminate outside in the beginning. You can increase the time between bathroom breaks as she gets the hang of it.
- Make and try to stick to an elimination schedule. Remember that you're not only teaching your puppy WHERE to go, you're teaching her WHEN to go too. A schedule will help train her body as well as her brain. If you notice that it's about time for your pup to eliminate, you take her out and she doesn't, just put her back into her crate for 10 to 15 minutes or so. Then try again.
- Try to put elimination on cue. Right before or as your puppy starts to relieve herself, say something like "Hurry up!" With repetition, you may be able to use your cue to prompt your puppy to eliminate when she goes outside.
- During the housetraining process, *always* go outside with your puppy. That way you'll know for sure whether or not she eliminates AND you'll be able to reward her when she does.
- When you take your puppy outside to eliminate, lead her to the same spot each time. Her nose will tell her that she's gone in that area before—and the smell may cue her to go again.
- If your puppy urinates when greeting you or other people, you may be dealing with a behavior called *submissive urination*, rather than a housetraining issue. To help eliminate this problem, greet your puppy VERY slowly and quietly when returning home or entering a room—or wait a few minutes, until she calms down completely, before greeting her at all. Ask visitors to do the same. When you arrive home, *immediately* take your puppy out, before doing anything else. Avoid leaning over your puppy, as this may exacerbate the problem. Also avoid yelling or scolding her if she does urinate in front of you during greetings or when you approach. Dogs use submissive urination to "turn off" aggression in other dogs, so if you become "aggressive" when your puppy performs this behavior, she may urinate *more*, in an attempt to make you less angry!

### RESOURCES & RECOMMENDED READING

If you'd like more information about housetraining, we highly recommend reading ***Way to Go!*** by Patricia McConnell. You can find it in the Lora Robins Gift Shop at the Richmond SPCA. For additional advice, you can call our **Behavior Helpline** at **804-643-SPCA**.