



## **Puppy House Training**

**Teaching a puppy where to toilet is one of the first skills that dog guardians want to work on, and we understand why!**

As your puppy acclimates to his new home he is learning lots of new skills, associations, and habits, and learning to go and where not to are important for the rest of your happy life together. You may have noticed that your puppy came to you seemingly unbothered about where she urinates or defecates – whenever she has the urge, she just seems to squat and go! And this is normal! Dogs as a species are usually unfussed about where they do their business (unlike most cats, for example), which means that housetraining is something that modern guardians must do systematically and deliberately, to help their puppy learn where to go and where not to go. Because the relief of emptying a full bladder or bowel just feels good, puppies naturally go any and everywhere in the first weeks of their lives. That doesn't mean they can't learn to eliminate in some places and not others: all dogs can! But it does mean that it requires teaching, usually in a puppy's first days, weeks, and months in his new home. That's where you come in: with patience, age-appropriate expectations and a good dose of supervision, all healthy dogs can learn where to go and where not to!

### **Can puppies “hold it”?**

Young puppies (and even some older puppies) physiologically cannot hold their urine or feces very long! You've probably noticed, and cleaned up a few accidents already. While it can be frustrating, it's important to note that your puppy is not eliminating to spite you, to be sneaky, or to communicate displeasure. They simply do not have the bladder and bowel control.

When housetraining a young puppy, it's not uncommon that they will need to eliminate every 15-30 minutes while awake, sometimes even more when active, or if they are especially small such as toy breed puppies. Housetraining a puppy is all about meeting these physiological needs in the

places you want them to be met – in your backyard or garden, on the potty pad, or in a litter pan, and preventing them from happening where you don't (not the carpet AGAIN).

If you cannot believe how often your puppy goes, or you're frustrated or taken by surprise by his bathroom needs, we want you to take a deep breath, you're right on track. If you follow a plan based on the tips below, your puppy won't need this level of supervision and housetraining attention for long in most cases. It's a lot, but it's not forever – the habits you build today will carry your puppy through his whole life.

### **Step 1: set your long term goals**

The first step to house training is to set a long term goal: where do you want your adult dog to relieve himself? Your puppy won't be a puppy forever, and the work you do now to teach him where to go to the bathroom will set him up for the rest of his life. Depending on your living situation, his size and breed, and your individual scheduling and family needs you might aim to have him toilet outdoors, to use an indoor potty spot, or both. Imagine your fully grown dog: what's your ideal plan for his toileting needs?

It is important to decide this from day one, even though you may use some temporary potty solutions as you work toward adult bathroom habits for your puppy. That's because toilet training a puppy is largely a matter of teaching surface and location preferences for toileting. Puppies (and the dogs they grow up to be) learn what surfaces to urinate or defecate on (and which ones not to) based on the practice you're about to give your pup now!

What's under her paws when she goes today will determine what she chooses to toilet on later in life. What would you like that to be? Grass? Gravel? A puppy pee pad? A litter box? There are no right answers for everyone, but there are likely right answers for you. So before continuing answer the following questions for yourself:

“When my puppy grows up, I want him or her to be comfortable eliminating on”:

- Grass
- Dirt
- Gravel
- Pebbles
- Sand
- Disposable Pee pads
- An indoor bathroom box
- Loose litters or pellets
- Other (\_\_\_\_\_)

“And I want him or her to avoid eliminating on”:

- Hardwood Floors
- Carpet
- Towels or soft items
- Throw rugs
- Furniture
- Magazines, paper, mail, or books
- Other (\_\_\_\_\_)

### **Potty Options:**

Once you have thought about what you'd like to teach your puppy, it's time to choose a setup. Since your puppy is learning surface preference for pottying— what he should feel under his paws when he eliminates—the simplest potty options are the ones that align with your ultimate goals. Plan to have your puppy potty in the yard? Take him there now to teach him where to go. Plan to have your dog use an indoor potty set up? Start with that! Making sure that what your puppy feels under his feet when he is peeing or pooping is what you want for him long term is easiest when you can go straight for the “real thing.”

But here's the thing: 8-12 week-old puppies need to go to the bathroom every 15-30 minutes when very active and awake, so when choosing a potty place for your puppy, choose pragmatically! If you live in a high rise, you might find those trips in and out impractical for the first weeks of your

puppy's life with you. In certain areas of high dog density and disease, your veterinarian might have advised you not to place your puppy down on public grass or sidewalks until she is fully vaccinated, which might limit your choice to go to the “real thing” for now.

You can teach a puppy to toilet outdoors, you can train the puppy to use an indoor potty spot, or both.

## **Puppy outdoor potty training**

If you have decided to teach your puppy to go outside, choose a general, safe, quiet area and designate it as the potty spot. Keep in mind that puppies, like babies and toddlers, are easily distracted and overwhelmed and less likely to go outside when they are experiencing either. Choose a spot away from other dogs and animals and people, like a quiet area of a backyard. Remember that surface! If your goal is to get your puppy comfortable eliminating on grass, choose a grassy spot. Likewise if you want her to eliminate on another surface.

## **Potty first, then play**

You can help your puppy learn to go in the right spot by going there first when you go outside. You might choose a leash, even if he's in a securely fenced area, to keep him from heading off to play with housemates or toys. Just like you have chosen a quiet area, you, too, should be quiet and calm. Think of yourself as just passively escorting your pup to their spot, and keep interactions with him to a minimum. This is not a time to talk to him, touch him or otherwise solicit his attention. Just hang out, and wait!

Once your puppy is eliminated, wait for him to finish and then it's time to play a bit. Quiet praise and allowing your puppy to explore the larger outside area for a bit are very effective ways to help your puppy understand that they can potty outside and still get a chance to have fun, too!

## **Potty Training: Indoors**

Every day, there are more safe, innovative options for setting up a sanitary indoor bathroom area for your puppy! Along with traditional absorbent disposable pads, there are potty patches made of real or artificial grass, litter pans much like a cat box, and many other options. If your plan is to

have your puppy learn to use an indoor bathroom, again, consider your surface goals for her as an adult. Is the goal that she eventually only goes outside? If so, you might make life easier for her and for you by choosing a surface texture that mimics the ultimate goal: artificial grass or a real patch might be in order. Do you plan on always using an indoor potty spot? Consider choosing a surface that you will use for her life, and consider a surface that is distinctive, so that her bathroom habits are confined only to her bathroom, and don't end up on floors, rugs or other items. Using a pellet litter, a distinctive location or box etc. can all help with this. Be aware that some dogs might have trouble distinguishing bare potty pads from other soft, white surfaces in the home (bath mats, anyone?) and will begin to choose these as a potty area as well. By making the area clear, either through location, texture, material, or all of the above, you lessen the risk of mistakes later on.

If you do choose an indoor bathroom area, consider integrating it into a larger "safe zone" for your puppy. This could be a puppy-proofed room or play pen, for example, with a place to sleep, access to fresh water, and appropriate enrichment toys. By creating this safe zone, you will make it easier for yourself and for your puppy to meet her needs.

### **Paper Training:**

Paper training is another tried-and-tested way to teach your pup which surfaces are good to eliminate on, and which aren't. When done correctly, paper training teaches the puppy to eliminate on a training pad, and then on progressively smaller areas of training pads until you are able to direct the puppy to specific areas where you want him to toilet. For some rural or suburban households, this may eventually mean pottying outdoors, while for urban dog guardians, it might mean eliminating them on a training pad in a designated indoor area.

If you choose to train this way, you can begin by creating a 'safe zone' area where the puppy can be confined when unsupervised. This can be either a pen or a small, puppy-proofed room with the pup's bed or crate (with door open), safe toys, food, and water bowl. Line the entire safe zone area with dog house training pads. At first, the puppy will toilet all over the place, but this way it will always be on a pad. Be sure to remove soiled pads as quickly as possible. After a day or two, gradually reduce the number of pads in the area by taking away one pad every few days, leaving a small area without a pad and an area covered in pads. Puppies don't like to toilet too near where

they eat or sleep, so ensure that the first pads you remove are the ones closest to the pup's bed and bowls.

## Step 2: Start houstraining!

Once you have set your goals and decided on where you'd like to teach your puppy to eliminate, it's time to get training! Follow these five guidelines, and your puppy will be going in the right spot soon enough!

### Rule 1: Set a schedule

This is the most important tip we can give you for houstraining your pup: **don't wait for him to need to go, take him to his potty spot on a schedule.** How often you'll need to take him out will vary from individual to individual and will change as he grows and matures, so there isn't one timing that will work for all. So how do you know how often to take him to his potty spot? Well, you'll know you're successful when your puppy is eliminating all or most of the time in that spot, and is having no accidents.

That's right, if your puppy is still having accidents, chances are you're not taking him to the toilet often enough.

While there is no universal rule, generally very young puppies need to eliminate:

- Once every 15-30 minutes while active and awake (if you can go longer, now's the time to thank your lucky stars! If not, know this won't last for very long we've all been here in the first weeks of having a pup!)
- After eating or drinking, regardless of how long it's been since the last potty break
- After a nap
- After vigorous play, running, or exploring

When you are first house training your dog, you are doing all the work to make sure he happens to be in the right place at the right time. Once he learns and matures you will slowly be able to shift this "responsibility" over to him. This will happen gradually over the first weeks and months your puppy lives with you. Soon, he'll be able to wait much longer and tell you

much sooner if he needs a bathroom break. It all depends on your consistency and schedule early on.

## **Rule 2: When your puppy is awake, he needs active supervision**

When you are first houstraining a puppy, it is essential that you get him to the right potty spot all or almost all of the time, you know that! And since you also now know that puppies don't care when or where they go, that means active puppies need active supervision. If your puppy is awake and moving, offer him a bathroom break every 15-30 minutes (more if you notice he's still eliminating in between your offers) by taking him to his designated potty spot and waiting quietly there for at least two minutes.

If this sounds exhausting, know that it can be, and doesn't mean you're doing anything wrong. After all, a puppy is a baby dog, and babies do take energy! Unlike a human baby, however, if you are consistent and successful at getting your puppy to potty where you want him to and supervising him well enough that you prevent accidents, you'll only be doing this for days or weeks in most cases, not months or years! And though it can feel like your puppy is awake all day, she really shouldn't be: most puppies sleep for between 18-20 hours a day, which means your close supervision hours are not as extensive as they might seem.

Houstraining is intensive, but it's for a very short period of your dog's life! The key to houstraining success is making sure when your puppy needs to go, you've already taken him to the right spot to do it.

## **Rule 3: Learn your puppy's signs and respond to them immediately**

Almost all puppies give some indications that they have a full bladder or bowel, but these signs can be subtle and vary from puppy to puppy. While supervising your puppy, watch closely for behaviors that reliably happen before he eliminates. This might be sniffing the ground, "waddling," or wandering off. When you see those signs, even if you just went to your potty spot, go again! Every time your puppy goes in the "right spot," he's building the houstraining habit. And every time you prevent an accident by reading his indicators and getting him there in time, you've gotten one step closer to your goal.

## What about potty bells?

Along with your puppy's natural signs that he needs to go, you can also teach your puppy to tell you he needs access to his potty spot. One popular way to do this is to use bells that your puppy learns to ring in order to tell you he needs you to take him out. You can teach him this by encouraging him to push the bells with his nose or paw every time you take him out.

These bells can be convenient for many families and many puppies learn how to use them astonishingly quickly! However, if you are considering them, here are a few notes of caution:

- Teach your puppy that bells = potty, not free range outdoors. In order for potty bells to help you learn your puppy's toileting needs, you'll need to be very consistent with taking your puppy outside to eliminate, not to play. One of the best ways to do this is to put your puppy on leash to head out, and in a "boring" way, hang out by your potty spot for 2 minutes or so. If the puppy doesn't go, time to head back inside! If she does, a little play is fine, but do make sure that it isn't so exciting that you're teaching your puppy that ringing bells is how she starts a play session with you.
- Bells are not a substitute for supervision. No matter how quickly your young puppy picks up using her potty bells, *you must still supervise your puppy inside*. If you want to have a quick reliable houstraining journey, there is no substitute for supervision to prevent accidents.
- If you want to designate a permanent toileting area in your home that is outside the puppy's safe zone, place another training pad in a quiet area that your puppy can easily get to. As you give your puppy more freedom, encourage him to use the pad by leading him to this area at hourly intervals and then less frequently as he learns to hold himself for longer periods.

## Rule 4: Learn how to respond to accidents (there will be a few!)

No matter how carefully we supervise, accidents can and do happen! And, as long as they are infrequent, they are no barrier to houstraining success, as long as you know what to do about them. (If they are happening frequently, go back to Rule 1.)

- **If your puppy starts to eliminate in front of you but in the wrong place, gently interrupt her without scaring her.** You



might call her name in a happy voice, make friendly sounds like a kissing noise, or gently clap your hands. Then *pick her up* and carry her to the right potty spot. If she finishes eliminating there, celebrate with her as if nothing happened!

- **Clean up thoroughly.** Your puppy's nose is exquisite, and one way she knows where to toilet is by smelling where she has toileted before. Even strong-smelling household cleaners will not mask the odor of a previous accident. Use a special enzymatic clear designed for pet urine and feces to break down the odor compounds in the spot, so that your puppy is not able to smell and repeat her performance.
- **Never, EVER, punish a puppy for eliminating in the wrong place.** This one is essential to quick and easy housetraining. Your puppy learns where to go by practicing, not by punishment, and he doesn't need to be told "no" to learn not to go in inappropriate places. But, if you do scare or intimidate him when he makes a mistake he's not likely to learn what you want: that this was a bad place to toilet. Instead, he's likely to learn that eliminating in front of YOU is scary. This lesson is inevitably strengthened when your puppy has an accident and you're not there to notice. He will learn that going in front of you is unsafe and scary, but eliminating away from you is just fine. This is how "sneaky toiletries" are made: puppies that sneak off behind a piece of furniture or into another room to toilet in peace. They're not doing this because they "know it's wrong" or are "trying to get away with it", they are doing what they've been taught by guardians that punish accidents. This is a much harder puppy to housetrain, so avoid this problem by avoiding punishing accidents: interrupt them gently if you see your puppy making a "mistake" instead, clean up thoroughly and move on.

If your puppy has an accident, interrupt gently and positively and take them to their spot. Clean up the accident, then make a plan so that you don't let it happen again!

### **Rule 5: Following all the rules and still having trouble? Talk to your vet**

Puppies are generally delightful adaptable creatures, but this joyful adaptable nature can sometimes hide underlying medical issues. If you've changed your potty schedule, increased supervision, learned your puppy's signs, eliminated or avoided any punishment, cleaned up all accidents thoroughly, and your puppy is still struggling with housetraining, it's time to consult with your veterinarian.

There are several issues, including anatomical anomalies, developmental delays, pain, or infection that thwart dedicated housetraining efforts. Like all young mammals, your puppy's immune system is not fully developed, which means infections, including of the urinary tract, are not uncommon. We cannot tell you how often we have seen a minor medical issue be resolved and seen housetraining take off, so don't neglect to include your puppy's veterinarian in the conversation if you're having trouble making housetraining progress.

## **Troubleshooting:**

If you've gone through all of the steps above, you still might have a few questions. Don't worry, we've got advice from expert puppy raisers.

### **Help: What about nighttime pottyng?**

A puppy's need to toilet at night varies widely by individual and by age, but many puppies need to go once or more during the night before 10-12 weeks of age. This is normal, and it's important to meet toileting needs at night as well as during the day. If your puppy sleeps in a safe space with an indoor toilet, you're all set! But if you are taking your puppy outside to eliminate, you may be wondering how often to get up, or whether to get up at all.

We won't lie, getting up in the middle of the night with a needy puppy isn't our favorite moment with our new family member, but we do need to do it! The goal is to transition away from it as soon as possible. To that end, *being consistent and responsive to your puppy's needs at night is the best way for everyone to get more sleep.*

### **Teach your puppy what's "on the menu" and how to ask for it**

When your puppy whines or cries at night, make a commitment to get up sooner rather than later. Once you are up, leash your puppy and walk or carry her to her potty spot. Minimize all interaction during this time, avoid talking to her, playing with her, etc. Once at the designated spot, stand there, and wait. Wait for a few minutes, then return inside with just as little fanfare as when you exited. There is no need for praise, exploration or play after potty at midnight. If she whines again (this is where it gets a bit hard! Be strong!), repeat the process.

## Why not let her “cry it out”?

Well, the truth is, crying it out is probably not great for puppies, and it definitely is less efficient and effective than what we’ve described above.

If you respond consistently to her whining, and if you are consistent with your behavior of *only offering a bathroom break*, your puppy will learn two essential things. First she will learn she doesn’t need to scream to get her needs met, which you both will need to live in harmony in the long term! Second, she will learn that the only thing “on the menu” after bedtime is a potty break. That means whining and crying for other things is likely to disappear, since you’ve never offered her those things in this context. You’ll then be free of the maddening desperate question of puppy parents everywhere who have tried letting their puppy cry it out, only to give in and take her out after she begins to scream: “Does she REALLY need to go or is she trying to get my attention/want to play/etc?”

Be consistent at night and you’ll be surprised how quickly your puppy settles into a routine of sleeping well, and only alerting you when she really needs a trip to the bathroom. Your consistent response will produce her consistent nighttime behavior.

## Help: I have a “sneaky toileter!”

If your puppy has been punished or scared (sometimes even inadvertently) for eliminating in front of people, you may be especially frustrated. It’s very upsetting to think all is going well only to step into the guest room and find a wet spot! Argh!

If you have a “stealth toileter” that wanders off to eliminate in inappropriate spots, don’t despair, go back to basics. Even if your puppy is older, go back to a supervision and toileting routine appropriate for a baby pup, taking her out every 30 minutes or even more often, and making sure she remains in your sight while inside. You might use a leash inside to keep her with you, a playpen or baby gates, or you might close doors to keep her out of unused spaces. Make sure you praise her and offer her something she wants (a tasty treat, time to play) when she eliminates in front of you in the appropriate spot. And above all, do not punish her for accidents. Punishment is often how this “sneaky” behavior is created in the first place: it’s not sneaky, it’s just our puppy learning that people are scary when they toilet in front of them or later when they are in the presence of the person

and their accidental creation. As hard as it can be to keep your cool, remember that your puppy is not sneaking off to toilet because she's trying to get away with anything, or because she "knows it's wrong." Ask any dog who stops to sniff poop or pee on a walk around the neighborhood, they don't even mind the stuff, so they don't ever use it to punish anyone! She's doing it because that's what's she learned to do. The way to help her learn a new way is to make sure you supervise, offer her lots of chances to get it "right" by taking her to her potty spot often, and avoid making toileting in front of you a scary issue. This is a human-created issue, which is good news: it means your behavior change can fix it!

### **You and your puppy WILL get there!**

It might sound silly to remember this, but if you work with your puppy, she will become housetrained. She will! We're confident saying this because we've seen so many puppies master these skills with the help of their attentive guardians. So repeat it with us: "my puppy will become housetrained, and this won't last forever!"

Having a puppy is a lot, and one of the most immediate overwhelming things is dealing with their toileting needs. At first, it can feel like you are constantly watching, interpreting, escorting your puppy to her designated bathroom(s), and not much else! The best news is, the more consistent you are in these early days (and it is often days if you're very consistent!), the faster you'll teach your puppy just where to toilet. If your puppy has an accident, the most important thing you can do to have success in the future is to clean up thoroughly and make a plan so you don't set her up to make that mistake again. Once you take this attitude, you'll find that housetraining success is just around the corner.

If you are consistent and vigilant, your puppy will become housetrained. You'll get there, and your pup will too.