

Housetraining

By Jennifer Skiba, Namastay Training

Housetraining is one of the first things on the “To Do” list when you get a puppy. If you adopt an older dog I recommend going back to basics and assume that the dog is not housetrained. Treat them like a new puppy. They might come with some housetraining but they don’t know the layout of your house or yard and what your rules are. It’s better to be more cautious than give them too much freedom and have accidents in the house.



Many owners think all they have to do is teach the dog to go potty outside. There are actually 3 aspects to house training.

- Signaling
- Location
- Waiting/ learning to “hold” it.

Signaling. We must teach our dog to tell us when they have to go out to go potty. Some dogs learn quickly which door they always use to go outside and they will stand at the door. But, if you are not there to see them standing at the door many puppies can't wait very long and they will urinate and defecate at the door. To prevent this from happening some owners try to teach their dog to bark. I don't prefer this method, as I don't want to teach my dog to bark at me when they want something. Instead, I prefer to bell train my dog. I hang bells by the back door and the dog learns to ring them to go outside. The sound of the ringing bells is easily heard throughout the house.

How do you teach this? It's easy. Hang the bells by the door jingle the bells and then open the door every time you take your puppy out to potty. Before you know it your puppy will go over and ring the bells himself to request to go outside. For the first year of your life if the dog rings the bell you must go let the dog out. Yes, they might ring the bells because they want to go play outside but the dog needs to learn that every time I ring the bell this door will open. Once they are over a year and fully house trained then if I am unable to let the dog out (I'm watching a movie) I can pick the bells up and put them on the counter. No bells = no outside time. You can only do this once the dog is house trained.

Location. We must teach the dog where we would like them to urinate and defecate. For many owners they say “I don’t care-just not in the house!” But, if you take a little extra time now you can create a lifelong toilet area for your dog. That is a designated area that the dog uses as their toilet. Why would you do that? It is so much easier to pick up feces in one area than it is to look all over the yard for it. This is especially helpful if you have children in the home and don't want your kids accidentally stepping in dog feces when they are outside playing.

How do you teach this? Pick your area in the yard that you want as your designated potty toilet. Take your puppy to the designated area every time you go outside and wait until the pup has eliminated. Praise profusely and give three yummy treats. Do this every time you go out and soon the area will have trace scent markers of their urination and defecation and the dog will instinctively be drawn to that area again. How do I designate an area? For some people they will use bark or

pea gravel as a marker for the dog and have an area in their yard sectioned off with that substrate. Some people don't have that option and need to use grass. How do I designate one section of grass from another? Go to Home Depot and buy the orange sprinkler flags and line them up making a square where you want your puppy to potty. They will become a visual cue for both your puppy and you. This ensures you are going to the same area to potty. Once the puppy starts going there on his own you can start to remove the flags one at a time until there's no more flags in the grass.

Waiting/learning to "hold" it. This is especially important to teach our puppies. They must learn to feel the sensation of wanting to go potty but holding it until they have the opportunity to do so. We have all done this in our life. Been somewhere and felt the urge to use the restroom and decided to go home or had to wait until you could find a restroom. Many puppies that are raised with a doggie door from the very beginning never learn this part of house training. Why would they? Every time they have to urinate or defecate they have free access to go outside. This makes training easier in the short term but more difficult in the long term. What if you go to visit friends and take your puppy with you and they don't have a dog door? The dog does not understand how to hold it or how to signal and therefore they are more likely to have a house training accident because they are not able to go out on their own.

How do you teach this? Dogs will not eliminate when they cannot get away from it. So using a crate is a great way to teach them how to hold it. You will only put your puppy in the crate for as long as their bladder can physically hold it. Puppies generally can hold it for about an hour for each month of age. So, if I have an 8 week old puppy I can put them in their crate for 2 hours. Three month old puppy = three hours etc. If I put the puppy in their crate and if I know they can hold it for 2 hours I will let them out of their crate at 2 hours and 5 minutes so the puppy is learning to hold it for 5 minutes. I will slowly increase the time that I'm asking them to hold it before I let them out. When I let them out I hustle them outside to the party area. It is not fair to leave the puppy in a crate longer than their bladder can hold them. If you do and they eliminate in the crate you will teach them to urinate and defecate in their crate which is something we do not want. So, what do I do when I have to be gone longer than 2 hours or 3 hours? I create a long term confinement area. A long term confinement area is a puppy proof area that has a bed, some water, toys and papers on the floor. Put the papers as far away from the bed as possible. Dogs instinctively eliminate as far from their bed as they can. This gives the puppy a place to hang out when you are at work or busy. If they potty it is easy to clean up. As they mature you will find less and less accidents on the paper. Think of the crate as a crib for sleeping and short periods and the long term confinement area as a play pen for longer periods of alone play time.

Here is a fabulous video talking about a puppy play pen area.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kn3aSPrndH4>

Troubleshooting. When your puppy is young they should be in one of four places

- Outside- if they make a mistake in house training it's not on your carpet it's just not in their toilet area.
- Long term confinement area - if they go potty it's not on your carpet and easy to clean up.
- Crate - where they won't go potty. Don't leave them longer than they can physically handle
- With you - being a hundred percent supervised. Watch for signaling and take them outside.

If you find yourself saying "Where is the puppy?" You are in trouble! It is very easy for a puppy to quickly urinate and defecate. What happens if your dog has an accident in the house? If you catch them in the middle of eliminating scoop them up and quickly run outside. They will probably be

startled and not finish their business that's okay give them a few minutes and then bring them in and put them in their crate. This way they can't finish their business while you are cleaning up the accident. Use a very good enzymatic cleaner if it's on carpet. Even though we may not smell it they may still smell it so use a really good carpet cleaner.

Additional hints.

When to take a puppy out - Puppies generally have to eliminate after eating, drinking a large amount, sleeping, playing. They will usually sniff around and walk in circles. When you see this hustle them outside to their toilet area. Do not carry small dogs outside to their toilet area.

Tracking - It is very helpful when your puppies are young to track their elimination

9 a.m. pee

9:30am breakfast

10:30am pee and poo

12:30pm pee

2:00pm pee

4:00pm pee

5:00pm dinner

6:30pm poo

By doing this you will start to see their natural rhythm. In the above example you can see the puppy pees every two hours and poos an hour after eating. When you know their natural rhythm you can start to manipulate that rhythm by using the crate to teaching them to hold it.

I also recommend marking accidents on the calendar. This helps you see progress or setbacks easily instead of trying to remember which can be difficult sometimes.

What NOT to do.

Don't EVER yell at your puppy or rub their nose in an accident. If you do this you are teaching the puppy to eliminate in secrecy or that potting makes you upset. This makes it very difficult to get them to potty outside in front of you. Every accident in the house is your fault. They don't understand the rules. They just know they have a bodily function and they do it. It is an unfair expectation to think that your puppy will know how to signal and where the location is at an early age. It is your job to teach them where they need to go.

It may seem in the beginning that all you are ever doing is watching your dog to go potty but it will get easier! Your puppy will grow and therefore have more muscle control, they will start to understand where they need to go through repetition, and soon you will have a dog who is well on their way to house training. I don't trust a puppy 100% until they are about 9 months to 12 months old. It's just too easy to forget and make an accident so always keep your eye on your puppy and reward them intermittently when they potty outside.

Take the time now to train them right from the beginning-you'll be glad you did!



Namastay Training

Teaching People to Listen, One Dog at a Time

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