

HOUSETRAINING PLAN

How to housetrain your dog or puppy



Basic info:

Dogs are naturally clean animals: given a choice, they will urinate and defecate away from their sleeping and eating areas. However, it is not obvious to dogs that carpets and floors are inappropriate elimination sites. They must be systematically taught to discriminate indoors vs. outdoors and to exclusively use the latter. The key to housetraining is getting a history of rewarded trials in the desired area.

It is of the utmost importance to never punish the dog for mistakes or you could make things worse and get an increase in mistakes.

Why punishment doesn't work:

- **Punishing (including scolding or yelling) can cause reverse housetraining**, where the dog learns they get punished for pottying in front of people, so they learn to hold it and sneak off out of sight to relieve themselves. This can even transfer to leash walks where the dog will not potty on leash, since the person is nearby.
- **Punishment corrodes the relationship and bond** between the dog and the human and can cause the dog to become fearful of the human, which can cause fear, anxiety or aggression in other contexts.
- **The dog doesn't look "guilty" or know they did anything "wrong."** Any "guilty" look is fear/anticipation from a history of punishment when people come home. Submissive urination is involuntary.

What we do:

- Predictable routines, schedules and interactions. Using an app like Puddle and Pile and can your data tracking
- No free run of the house for at least 3 weeks.
- Dog will be strictly confined using a crate, small confinement area (like a bathroom, kitchen or pen), tethered to you on leash, carried (if a small dog)
- While you are at work dog will be confined.
- Overnight, dog will be confined.

When you're home:

- Dog will be taken out of the confinement space on a predictable, strict schedule based on age (1 hour for every month of age until 6 months so 2 month old gets confined for 2 hours at a time). Dog goes immediately from confinement to desired potty location so this means you have your leash, treats, shoes, etc. ready before you take the dog out of confinement.
- If dog does both functions (or what you expect him to do at that time) then he is "empty" and can have a free period where you supervise and play, engage and interact outside the confinement space.

Going out with the dog:

- You must accompany the dog to know what they did and so you can immediately reward the potty action. Do not wait for them to return to you before rewarding.
- Before you let the dog out of confinement:
 - Get the treats from the fridge
 - Grab the leash
 - Take the dog out of confinement and immediately go to the potty area (carry if moving through the home or common space in an apartment)
 - Reward the dog after they potty in the correct place
 - Take the dog back to the free period space and start your timer for 30-60 minutes
- If the dog didn't potty or didn't do both functions as expected, the dog does not get free period. He is NOT empty. Re-confine and try again in 30 minutes.

What is rewarding?

- High value, human food, like little pieces of hot dog or cheese **PLUS**
- Happy talk - high pitched "what a good dog! Good girl!" or cheering "Yay! Good job!"
- Do **BOTH** of these things. Praise is **NOT ENOUGH**.
- Do not be stingy with your food. If this amazing food party only happens when the dog potties in the area we want them to do, they will learn to repeat that behavior.

What next?

- After 2 weeks of no mistakes, you can start to loosen up management and increase free time.
- Supervise whenever he's uncaged, especially if he's "full." If you must take your eyes off him, even for a minute, confine him.
- Interrupt mistakes NICELY. Catch him as he starts to go, not afterwards. Then hustle him to the bathroom area and praise if he finishes here. Then clean up the indoor mess.
- Never punish late. If he made the mistake one hour or ten seconds ago, you are too late. It is unfair and abusive to punish late.
- Catch him in the act of doing it right: follow the rules so you are the good guy.

Regressions or lack of progress:

- If you are following a strict protocol and are not making progress, it may be time for a vet check. Measure and track your dog's water intake so you know how many ounces of water your dog is drinking in a 24 hour period.
- NEVER RESTRICT WATER as a means of housetraining. Not only is this cruel, but knowing how much your dog is drinking could be indicative of an underlying medical issue. Dogs should have access to fresh, clean water at all times.
- Illness can cause a trained dog to regress as can a change in routine. A sudden diet change often causes diarrhea that the dog can't control. Many dogs do not generalize their housetraining to all indoor locations.