

Housetraining

The goal of housetraining is to instill the habit of using the outside area for a potty. We are guided in the training by the value that punishment has absolutely no place in housetraining a puppy. Remember that you are dealing with a baby, and so we will need lots of patience and kindness as we train these small puppies. All housetraining accidents are HUMAN error! This is the #1 rule of housetraining!

You will first need to decide what area you want the puppy to use, because all potty breaks will be to this same area. Make sure and keep a warm coat by the door because potty breaks are always supervised so that success can be rewarded. If you open the door and send the puppy outside, you can be assured that she will likely play, maybe potty and then sleep — and when you call her in she will need to go potty again — on the rug.

Your job when housetraining is to take the puppy outside and wait until she has success, and then reward it. I say, "potty" as I see that the puppy is about to accomplish the mission, so that she learns to associate this word with the desired behavior. It comes in handy when traveling and you want the dog to hurry up and do their business when it is 20 degrees and the snow is blowing! Take little treats out with you, and give one to the puppy when the mission was successful.

Puppies need to go potty a lot. When your puppy arrives home, you should count on taking her out every 20 minutes when she is awake. If you take her out after 20 minutes, and nothing happens, I would take her out again in 5 minutes. Puppies also need to be taken out upon waking and right after eating. I suggest that you carry your puppy outside so as not to have an accident on the way out the door.

Your job is to NEVER allow accidents in the house — ever!! The only way you can accomplish this is by watching your puppy at all times unless she is in a crate. An accident in the house is the start of a habit, and so it is a setback in the housetraining plans.

Watching a puppy means eyes on the puppy at all times — not just having the puppy in the room while you cook or watch TV. If you are vigilant and do not allow accidents to happen, you will have a dog that is quickly housetrained. If you are sloppy about it, the dog will be confused about the rules because sometimes it pees in the house and sometimes it doesn't — and housetraining will take a long time.

Okay — let's pretend your partner/child/spouse was in charge of the puppy and s/he does not have the same level of commitment so we have a puddle. First, get out the newspaper, roll it up, and deliver a good whack to the human who has so failed at such a simple task! Then clean up the puddle and make sure to de-scent it. It is critical that you neutralize the odor since the smell is what draws a dog to its bathroom (a reason we use the same spot outside). I use Nature's Miracle on rugs for any pee/vomit/etc. and I use white vinegar to remove odor from hard floors.

There is absolutely no recourse for the puppy for having peed on the floor — she is just being a baby puppy and her caregiver failed (none of us are perfect so whack the human gently :). In the old days, people advocated shoving a puppy's nose in the mess — what absurdity!! The puppy would learn one thing from that — the human is scary.

Dogs have some wonderful strengths that we humans lack, but they do not have the ability to understand cause/effect when time has elapsed (more than 2 seconds). So never, ever provide consequences to a puppy for a housetraining accident. What if you see an accident starting to happen?? Race over, scoop up the puppy holding her upside down (cradled like a baby), and head immediately for the potty zone. Deposit the puppy and praise wildly for success.

Our dogs go out the back door when they need to potty. I want the puppy to learn that when she needs to go out, she should head for the door. Therefore, any time the puppy enters the area even remotely by the back door, I pretend that she has just asked to go out and pick her up, praise her cleverness as I take her to the potty zone, and reward for success.

If you cannot watch the puppy, and you cannot recruit a replacement, then the puppy should be in a place where an accident in the house is not possible. If you have a fenced yard, that can be a good choice but be sure you see the puppy potty before bringing her in because as I mentioned, she was likely just sleeping.

You can put your puppy in a crate when you are unavailable — most puppies will not potty in a crate. You can also use an x-pen for when you have to be gone longer – create a toilet area with some newspaper – but you will then need to be careful about leaving newspapers on the floor in other parts of the house!

Expect the puppy to need to go out at least once during the night for the first couple weeks or more. Night time potty breaks should be fast, no talking except praise for success, and right back to bed. You do not want to encourage 2 am play sessions!

In summary — have a potty zone picked out. Watch the puppy at all times when she is awake. When awake, take her out every 20 minutes and stay with her until the mission is accomplished. Also take her out when she wakes up and after meals. Reward success. Ignore accidents, except to scold the human who caused the problem. Neutralize all accident spots. Limit the puppy's access in the house. Use a crate or other means of confinement when the puppy cannot be watched. Although the amount of time between potty break will gradually be lengthened, do not relax your vigilance for a number of weeks. Finally — the #1 rule — all accidents are the fault of the humans involved, not the puppy!