



House Training Your Adult Dog

Whether your dog lived outdoors, in a puppy mill or hoarding situation, was just never taught to potty outdoors, or simply needs some re-training after spending time in a shelter, it is almost always possible to houstrain your dog – even later in life!

As you follow these steps, it is very important to stay positive. It can be extremely frustrating when your dog has accidents in the house, but scolding or punishing your dog *never* helps. In fact, doing those things can actually make houstraining even harder.

Setting Your Dog up for Success

- Always supervise your dog when he is in the house. Attach him to your belt loop with a leash or use a door or baby gate to confine him to whatever room you're in. If you are unable to supervise your dog closely, put him in his crate.
- Feed your dog meals at regular times rather than leaving a bowl of kibble out all day. This will allow you to better predict when your dog will need to go poop. Most people don't find they need to limit water intake, but if you're having an especially hard time with pee accidents, you might want to try offering water at specific times throughout the day so you can predict when she will need to go potty.
- Accompany your dog outside when it's time to go potty, and bring yummy treats with you. The moment he starts to go to the bathroom outside, praise him and offer a treat as soon as he is done. Waiting until you've come back inside to praise and give treats will be confusing for the dog and could lengthen the houstraining process.

How to House Train Your Dog

- Ideally, start with your dog on leash. Take your dog to her "potty spot," wherever you'd like her to go potty in your yard. You will take her to the same place each time it's time to go to the bathroom.
- When you get to the potty spot, stand still and do not interact with your dog. You don't want to distract your dog from what she is supposed to be doing. Give her 5 minutes. If she doesn't potty in that time, take her back inside and try again in 1 to 5 minutes, being sure to keep a close eye on her while she's in the house.
- When you see your dog start to potty, give her a command (e.g., "Go Potty!") When she has finished, praise her and give her a yummy treat (something really delicious like cheese, hot dogs, leftover chicken, etc.)

- After she has successfully gone potty outdoors, let her have some fun and run around a bit outside. If you take your dog inside right away after potty, there's the risk of teaching her that going potty means all the fun stops. This may cause her to try and hold it as an attempt to stay outside longer. This is why you want to be as boring as possible while waiting for her to potty – you're teaching her that potty outside leads to praise, treats, and a fun romp outside!
- Most adult dogs can go a few hours between potty breaks. At first, you may want to try taking your dog out every hour. As you get to know your dog, you will be able to adjust the length of time between potty breaks. It is better to have too many potty breaks than too few.
- Eventually, if you are consistent with telling your dog to "Go Potty" as she is going, you will be able to tell your dog to go potty on command. This is useful for dogs that are so excited to be outside that they forget what they are supposed to be doing!

How to Handle Accidents

- If you catch your dog mid-accident, interrupt him by clapping or saying "ah-ah!" and immediately take him outside to finish. If he goes outside, praise him and give him a treat.
- If you find a mess after it's already happened, do not scold or punish your dog in any way. Many people believe their dogs "act guilty" when they've had an accident in the house. It's true that your dog may cower or hide after having an accident, but this is a result of expecting you to be upset about something, not because he knows that going potty in the house is wrong. In your dog's mind, he's being punished for going potty, not going potty *in the house*.
- Clean any accidents with an enzymatic cleaner such as Nature's Miracle, or another pet-specific cleaner. These cleaners are made to remove residual odors so the dog isn't tempted to continue peeing and pooping in the same spot.
- Try to figure out what went wrong – were you not supervising closely enough? Did you go too long between potty breaks? This will help you prevent the same mistake in the future.

Other Reasons Dogs Have Accidents

Marking

Dogs that have not been spayed or neutered ("fixed"), especially male dogs, are prone to marking their territory. If your dog has been recently neutered (in the past 6 weeks), or was neutered later in life, he may be more prone to marking behavior. You won't likely be able to teach your dog to stop marking completely, but you can teach him when and where is appropriate to mark.

- Use a product such as Belly Bands or dog diapers to prevent a mess in your home. These products catch your dog's urine in an absorbent pad so if he tries marking in your house, your belongings will be protected. This is a nice back-up in case your dog lifts his leg too quickly for you to get him outside. Additionally, if your dog is prevented from marking on your belongings, his scent won't be there to encourage him to continue marking in the same spot.
- Praise and reward your dog for marking outdoors, just as you would for normal potty breaks.

Anxiety

Some dogs have accidents while their owners are away because they are distressed by their absence. There are some things you can implement to try and alleviate some of your dog's anxiety. If these simple fixes aren't working, you may need to talk to a professional trainer and your veterinarian for other options.

- Teach your dog to love her crate. Never use the crate as a punishment. Teach her to go in the crate on her own by giving her yummy treats when she is nearby the crate, touches the crate, or enters the crate on her own. Feed her meals in the crate to form a positive association.
- Some dogs seem to enjoy having the radio or TV left on while you're away.
- Give your dog a long-lasting treat right before you leave, such as a Kong toy stuffed with cream cheese or peanut butter. This will keep her occupied for a little while as well as show her that good things happen when you leave.
- Talk to your vet about trying a mild, over-the-counter calming supplement such as Zylkene, Composure, or Rescue Remedy. These will work best when used in conjunction with training.

Medical Issues

Dogs may have an underlying medical issue that complicates housetraining. If you are following the above suggestions and don't feel you are making adequate progress, consider having your dog thoroughly examined by your veterinarian to rule out a possible medical cause.

However, if your previously housetrained dog suddenly starts having accidents in the house, a trip to the veterinarian should be the first step.

A note on Punishment

Never punish your dog for having accidents in the house. If you find a soiled area, do nothing but clean it up. Animals don't understand punishment after the fact, even if it's only seconds later and will do more harm than good.

Rubbing your dog's nose in it, taking her to the spot and scolding her, or any other punishment will only make her afraid of you. In most cases, using disciplinary methods for accidents in the home only teaches the dog to go potty away from you. This can make it more difficult to teach your dog to go potty outside on a leash because you scolded them for going to the bathroom near you.

For more personalized behavior help, CAHS offers low-cost obedience classes as well as a free Behavior Helpline. Call or email the Behavior Department for more information!

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