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Your Smart Dog

Cool Bathroom Tricks – Even for Housetrained Dogs

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Last month's article taught you how to get your dog to ring a bell to signal a bathroom break. I got so much feedback from that article, people asking other bathroom-related questions, I thought an entire newsletter could be devoted to the subject. **These suggestions will help you and your dog – even if he's wonderfully house trained.** This isn't a house training article – it just happens to be about bathroom issues.

PUT POTTY ON CUE

Have you ever been running late for work, or in a hurry because it's raining or cold, and wished you had a way to tell your dog to hurry his bathroom activities? Like any other behavior, you can put toileting on cue. With the behavior on cue, you can tell your dog when and where to do it. It's great for hurrying your dog, for re-directing the distracted dog (I see a squirrel, I forgot why I'm out here!), and for letting your dog know the purpose of being outside (no, it's not for a walk, it's not for playtime, it's for *bathroom* time!).

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It doesn't matter how young (or old) your dog is – all dogs can learn! If you've got an older dog, go ahead and add a cue for bathroom time. You'll be surprised how quickly the dog picks up on it.

First, decide on your cue. The best cues are short and simple, and very plain. For us, the word is "business," as in *do your business*. Other good cues I've heard: "hurry," "potty," and "go." Pick a word you won't be embarrassed to say if there are people around.

Next, take your dog out on a leash. **As soon as you see him start to go to the bathroom, say your cue.** Just say the cue once, and calmly. As soon as your dog is finished, praise him. Try to predict when your dog will squat (or lift a leg) and say the cue just a smidge before your dog starts the behavior. Continue to pair the new word (the cue) with the behavior of going to the bathroom.

Then, after a week or so, say the word about a second or two before your dog starts to go to the bathroom. If you know your dog's habits and body language, this is a really easy task. Always say the word just once, in a calm manner, and praise your dog when he's finished.

If you've been consistent and practiced frequently, your dog now associates the cue ("business") with the action (going to the bathroom). **You can now use the cue to initiate the action.** Next time you're outside, about the same time your dog is probably ready to do his business, give your cue, just once. When the dog goes to the bathroom, praise him, give him a treat, the works! **You've now got a way to hurry your dog up**



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when your short of time, or in nasty weather.

BELL REFINEMENTS

If your dog thinks the bell is for *anytime* walks, not just for bathroom breaks, I've got an easy solution for you. When your dog rings the bell to go outside, oblige him. You're now going to change what happens when you get outside. To teach the dog that the bell is for bathroom breaks only, go to the preferred bathroom spot, say your cue, then wait. Don't walk around, don't play, don't engage. Simply stand. Give your dog two to three minutes to do his thing, then return indoors.

Consistency is key. Ringing the bell means: we'll go outside and stand still. We won't go for a walk, we won't play, we won't interact. After a few days, your dog will understand that the bell means he can go out – a great thing if he's got to go to the bathroom. But not so great if what he really wants is a social hour or a play-fest.

I'd be lost without a cue for my dog that tells him when to go to the bathroom. I use it every day. All habits are easiest taught early on in the dog's life, but all dogs can learn, no matter their age. Patience, persistence, and consistency are all you need. Happy training!

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