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Your Smart Dog Housetraining Made Easy February 2008

Once you get over the cuteness of that little puppy face, you realize there's so much to teach your new pup. One of the top priorities is usually housetraining - teaching the pup that the potty area is *outside* (not on the rug in the dining room!).

Or maybe you've just adopted an older dog who isn't housetrained. In both cases, the earlier you start changing behavior, the better!

Housetraining can be one of the easiest things you'll teach your dog, but only if you have the right mix of tools, management, and schedules.

Raising service dogs, a new puppy graces our household about once a year. Which means we're housetraining a new pup on a yearly basis. We'll be on pup number six later this year! **Housetraining can be one of the easiest things you'll teach your pup, but only if you have the right mix of tools, management, and schedules.**

The same schedule and tools that you use for a puppy can (and should) be used for an adult dog who isn't housetrained. Things you'll need: a crate, baby gates, a leash and collar, and treats. Oh, and a big helping of supervision!

Tools

As I mentioned above, you'll be most successful if you have tools on hand to help. Let's take a look at each of those tools in detail.

Crate

A crate is an essential tool for housetraining and for keeping your pup safely confined when you're not at home. Generally, dogs don't like to go to the

bathroom in the same area they sleep. An appropriate sized crate should allow your dog to stand up, turn around, and lie down comfortably. Most crates are labeled for the appropriate breed(s). Your crate should be large enough for your pup, but not *too large*. Many crates can be sectioned off - so you can buy a crate large enough for your full-grown dog, but also be able to make the crate smaller for your puppy for the time being.

Baby Gate

You'll need some way to safely confine your pup to the room that you're in. Constant supervision is one of the keys to quick housetraining and gating off the room ensures that your pup can't wander into another room and do his business.

Leash and Collar

You'll be taking your pup outside to relieve himself quite frequently. It's important to have your pup on a leash and collar so he can't run off. Plus, it's advisable to get your pup used to the leash and collar early, as our society requires that dogs be leashed whenever they're out in public.

Treats

Food treats are used to reinforce your dog for eliminating in the appropriate spot. Offering a tasty morsel as your dog is finishing up lets him know he did a good job.

(Throughout the remainder of this article, I will use the term "pup" for simplicity, but everything is also applicable to older dogs as well.)

Schedule

Put your pup or dog on a schedule. Give your pup meals at about the same time every day. Allow your pup about 15 minutes to finish the food in his bowl and then put the bowl up - whether or not there is any food left. At the next



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scheduled feeding, repeat the process, removing the bowl after 20 minutes. Don't put the bowl back down in between feedings; your pup won't starve!

It's important not to allow your pup to graze or to "free-feed." In either grazing or free-feeding, food is left down for the pup all day or until he eats it. **We know that about 15 minutes after a meal, your pup will need to eliminate.** With this piece of information, you've already got a headstart on housetraining – predictability! If you allow your pup to free-feed, however, that predictability is lost.

Other prime times to get your pup outside include the following:

1. Immediately after a nap
2. Immediately after they are taken out of the crate
3. 15 minutes after a meal
4. Immediately after a "wild" play session

Punishment will slow down the housetraining process.

Management

The crate and baby gates will allow you to manage your pup's movement so that he's either secured in the crate or you're always nearby to watch for signs that he has to eliminate. Think of your new puppy as a human toddler just beginning to gain mobility. You'd never dream of leaving the room – even for a moment – if you've got a mobile toddler, it's simply too dangerous. They're too fast and could get into trouble quickly. The same is true for your puppy.

It only takes a few seconds for them to eliminate. If you're not around to (1) notice their signals and (2) take them immediately outside, then you can't help them "get it right" by taking them to an appropriate spot to eliminate. Every time they are successful at eliminating indoors, the more it seems like that is the right spot to go. Minimize mistakes – supervise your puppy!

If you can't supervise or need to leave the room, pop your puppy back into his crate until you're able to supervise. Need to run to the bathroom? Someone at the door? Need to get some cleaning done? Want to read the paper and have a cup of tea? **Put your pup in the crate first, then take care of whatever needs your attention.**

A different, but similar option is to tether your dog to you. If you'd like your pup to be able to be with you in the living room while you're cleaning and would rather not crate your pup, put the pup on his collar and leash and attach the leash to your belt. You'll be close enough to monitor your puppy's movements and also have the benefit of having the puppy in the same room with you.

Another Important Consideration

If your pup suddenly has a re-lapse in his housetraining, and you've followed all the guidelines above with no success, it's time to take your pup to the veterinarian. Your vet can examine the pup and perform any necessary tests to rule out an underlying medical condition. No amount of management or training will help housetrain a pup with a urinary tract infection or other related problem!

While the word "pup" was used here for ease of reading, remember that this applies to adult dogs as well. If you've just adopted a dog who isn't housetrained, all of the above information is relevant for your dog. It only takes a little bit of planning and supervision for your dog to be housetrained.

You'll also notice that nowhere in this article have I mentioned punishing your puppy for going to the bathroom inside. That's because it's your job to teach the pup where to eliminate. If you aren't watching your pup and he goes inside the house, it's not the pup's fault – he needs more supervision. **In fact, punishment will slow down the housetraining process.** The pup



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will learn to eliminate anywhere *except* where you are – so if you have the pup outside on a leash and have previously punished the pup for going to the bathroom, you may have a long wait! Also, when inside, your pup will try to hide from you when he needs to go to the bathroom. Which makes it much easier to key in on his subtle body signals that indicate he needs to go to the bathroom.

With perseverance, management, and supervision, housetraining can be quickly mastered. Make it a priority and you'll be surprised at how quickly your pup gets the hang of it!

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