

As a small animal veterinarian, I have fielded more questions about house-training issues than any other subject. This article is intended to be concise, something you can print out and hang on your refrigerator to reference frequently during the house-training process. This advice was gleaned from several sources: lectures I attended during veterinary conferences, texts on behavior and training, and trial-and-error. It may seem strict, but it is the most efficient and effective way that I know to house-train a dog, young or old.

FIRST PRINCIPLE: PREVENT "ACCIDENTS"

Dogs or puppies in the process of being house-trained need to be in one of three places at all times:

- 1) Outside on a leash with you, so that you can reward him/her immediately for pottying outside;
- 2) Inside on a leash attached to you, so you can pick up on your pet's subtle signals that he/she needs to go out (sniffing, circling);
- 3) Inside confined to a small, easily cleaned area--a kennel is best, since most dogs will not go to the bathroom in their sleeping area.

Take your dog outside:

- right after the pet wakes up (even if it was only napping);
- every 15 to 30 minutes while playing; and
- after eating.

Eating, playing, and walking/running stimulate intestinal movement, usually in a predictable manner. For instance, some pups need to have a bowel movement immediately after eating, while for others (especially older dogs) it takes 30 minutes or more. On the other hand, it may take over 20 minutes of playing to stimulate intestinal movement. Once you find the right time interval for your pet, be sure to take it outside just before you expect the urge to strike. Keep in mind that young puppies are like young children, in that they don't always realize they have to go until it's too late to signal you. Taking them out frequently will

help prevent accidents.

SECOND PRINCIPLE: COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

Reward:

- With a small treat WHILE the pet is going to the bathroom, and say (in a calm but obviously pleased tone) "Good potty," or whatever code word you want to use for that event.
- Once he/she is done, reward with praise and play. A pet that has eliminated successfully outside can be rewarded further by allowing play inside the house. If he/she doesn't 'go' while outside, the pet should be brought in and confined to the kennel or leashed to you until the next trip outside.

Punishing: Never!

I do NOT recommend punishing pets that have accidents in the house. This includes 'rubbing their nose in it'. Occasionally this will stop them from using the home as a bathroom, but more often they are conditioned to believe that you get mad whenever they eliminate, so they just hide it better. If you catch your pet in the act, make a loud noise to startle (but not frighten) it, which will hopefully stop it in mid-stream. Then whisk the pet outside to complete the process.

Using scent to signal proper location:

Anyone who has ever taken a male dog for a walk knows that when they smell another dog's urine, they will add their scent to that spot. Use this to your advantage. If your pet does eliminate in the house, take it (or the wet paper towels) outside. Don't force the pet's nose into it--he or she can smell it from much farther away than you can. Pushing its nose down will upset the pet, and defeat the purpose. Instead, lay the soiled cleaning materials (NOT ones with a cleaner, such as Pine Sol or bleach, on them!) on the ground, allow the dog to sniff, say your code phrase ("Good potty"), and move on.

Signaling:

One common problem dogs have with house-training is that they don't know how to signal that they need to go out. Many will just sit quietly by the door, so if you don't see them in time, an accident could happen. You can overcome this problem by deliberately teaching the dog a signal, such as barking (teach "speak", then take outside every time the dog speaks), or ringing bells that are hung on the door. You can encourage the dog to ring the bells by first smearing a bit of peanut butter on them; when the dog licks the bells enough to make a noise, say, "Outside" or "potty" (use the same word or phrase every time), then take them out. Eventually they will learn that ringing the bells gets you to open the door.

Eliminating On Command:

Training your dog to eliminate on command can be useful and is easy to do. Just use the same phrase or word every time you take the dog out, and say it again while the dog is doing what you've asked it to do, such as, "Good potty!", and repeat it as you give the dog a treat (remember, give the treat DURING elimination, so your pet knows exactly what it is being rewarded for). Consistency is the key. If everyone involved in the training remembers to use the same phrase, you will all be teaching your dog to eliminate on command the same way you would teach it to sit on command. If you do train your dog this way, make sure you tell any boarding facility, veterinarian, or pet sitter about it, or the poor thing may not want to go to the bathroom the whole time it is in someone else's care!

FINAL PRINCIPLE: OVERALL HEALTH

Problems? Finally, inability to housebreak a dog can be a symptom of a medical problem. Urinary tract infections, certain metabolic disorders (such as diabetes), or intestinal disease can make housebreaking difficult, because they interfere with the dog's ability to control things. If you are having trouble house-training your pet, please don't hesitate to call your veterinarian.