

# Housebreaking Demystified

## WHAT DOES HOUSETRAINED MEAN?

This means that your dog can remain inside your house for a reasonable amount of time (about eight hours) without eliminating in it. Your dog simply "holds it" until you let him outside to do his business. If your dog is physically healthy and physically mature (meaning he is at least eight to twelve months of age) but he has more than one accident every couple of months, then he is NOT housetrained.

## HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE FOR ME TO HOUSETRAIN MY PUPPY?

To teach your dog WHERE to eliminate takes only a couple of weeks. But for a young dog or puppy to actually BE RELIABLE requires that the dog be mature enough physically to hold off eliminating until the appropriate time, or until he can motor himself to the "outhouse." **A dog cannot be called reliable or housetrained until he is at least eight to twelve months of age, AND has not had any accidents in the house for at least six weeks running.**

## HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE ME TO HOUSETRAIN MY ADULT DOG?

For an older dog with bad potty habits, or one who has never been housebroken, you can expect to spend about six to eight weeks (following a strict housebreaking plan), before a new behavior pattern is established.

If you have an older dog who is starting to make mistakes in the house when he was fine for years before, either he has a physical problem that prevents him from holding it (please have your dog checked with your veterinarian first before going on a strict housebreaking program) or he did not fully understand that he is NEVER to eliminate in the house.

## WHAT IS PAPERTRAINING? I HEARD THAT IT IS THE EASIEST WAY TO TRAIN HIM.

Papertraining means that you teach your dog to eliminate on papers placed INSIDE your house. By papertraining a dog you teach him it is OK to number one, eliminate in the house, and number two, it is OK to go on objects in the house. That means the unread Sunday paper you left down on the floor is fair game, and the coat you haven't hung up yet is also fair game. The idea of housetraining is again, to teach your dog NEVER to eliminate in the house.

Papertraining is NOT the easiest way to train him. Papertraining a dog in the house and then trying to teach him to go outside only confuses him and takes him much longer to achieve reliability.

If you live in a condo or townhouse, you probably have a small porch or balcony. Teach your dog to eliminate in a large pan (like an oil drip pan used in garages; some pet stores actually carry large dog potty pans just for this purpose) that has



cat litter in it, **which is placed outside**. That way you have provided him with a place to potty that is outside your house but is still very easy to clean up.

OK, SINCE PAPERTRAINING IS OUT, WHAT ABOUT TEACHING HIM TO USE A DOGGIE DOOR?

Allowing your puppy or un-housetrained dog the use of a doggie door does nothing except undermine your housetraining for several reasons. Number one, you never really know if the dog did his business or not because **you were not there to see it**. Number two, your dog will not eliminate in the target area on his own since you were not there to show him where it is.

Doggie doors are fine to use AFTER your dog is completely reliable. Please note that if you are having any type of aggression or destructive behavior, a doggie door is not recommended as it gives your dog too much freedom.

HOW DO I CLEAN UP AN ACCIDENT?

To do this you will use the stand and blot method. Translated, this means either use a wad of paper towels or newspapers placed over the spot, and stand on them for about 30 seconds. Then dispose of the soiled papers and apply your enzyme cleaner. Let the enzyme cleaner soak in for about five minutes or whatever the label recommends. Then use the stand and blot method to soak up the excess moisture. For those solid accidents, just pick up that offending article and thoroughly scrub the area with the cleaner.

I HAVE HEARD THAT YOU CAN TEACH YOUR DOG TO GO WHEN YOU TELL HIM. HOW DO I TEACH HIM THIS?

This is called teaching your dog an elimination command. First choose one word or short phrase that you will always use when you want him to go. Good choices are "BETTER GO," "HURRY," "DO YOUR BUSINESS," "DO YOUR DUTY," OR "DUTY TIME." Pick something you will be comfortable saying in public because you will want to have your dog eliminate

on command when you are away from home! Once you have chosen a command, each time you take your dog out to do his business (AS HE IS ELIMINATING), say his command such as "HURRY UP" and praise him for doing so. Say the command several times AS HE IS GOING. Remember to give him a treat when he is finished.

It will take him about six to eight weeks of consistent work from you before he will start to recognize the command and actually eliminate when you say it.

CAN I TEACH MY DOG TO USE ONLY ONE AREA OF THE YARD?

YES! This is called training your dog to use a target area. A target area is a small portion of your yard in which you want your dog to always eliminate. About a six foot by six foot area is plenty big enough for one dog.

A target area saves on your landscaping and you do not have to perform the "seek" method when you clean the yard. Also, your kids will appreciate not having land mines all over the place!

First, pick a command word or short phrase that you will always use when you take him out here. Good target area commands are "OUTSIDE," "OUTHOUSE," "YARD" or anything else you wish.

Next, say the word as you are walking your dog out to his target area. Just make sure you are always using the same word as you help your dog motor to the target area. Praise him as he is motoring out there.

After about six to eight weeks of training this word, you can start to use it to direct your dog to his target area. Should he make a mistake in the house or in another part of the yard, just give him his target area command. Remember to always praise your dog for using the correct area in your yard.

Reminder: When using target areas, please make sure you keep the area clean. Some dogs will refuse to use a target area if it is dirty. Pick up the area at least every other day, or daily if you have multiple dogs.

#### HOW LONG CAN A DOG "HOLD IT"?

It depends upon how old they are! For young dogs, a good rule of thumb to remember is that your dog is able to hold elimination for as many hours as he is in months of age. If your dog is two-months-old, he can hold it for up to two hours maximum during the day if he is not active. If your puppy is active, he will have to go out more often. At night, most dogs can generally go longer. Most puppies by the time they are twelve weeks of age can sleep the entire night through without having to go out.

For full-grown dogs with no physical or separation anxiety problems, they should be able to go an eight-hour day without a problem, **once you have put them on a regular schedule.** Remember that a full-grown dog is at least eight to 12 months old.

#### I CAN'T POSSIBLY WATCH MY YOUNG PUPPY ALL DAY! I HAVE TO RUN ERRANDS AND WORK PART TIME!

If you have a very young dog who is not old enough to hold it during your work day or perhaps he is too young to sleep through the night, then you need to provide a safe area big enough so he can eliminate in one corner and sleep in another part of that same area. Examples would be a portion of the kitchen blocked off with his crate placed in one corner, or an exercise pen placed in a tiled room.

To help with clean up when you return, you may line the area with newspaper before you leave. But as soon as you come home, all the paper gets taken up and you try to get your puppy out before any accidents happen.

A better way to deal with leaving a young dog for long periods of time is to ask a neighbor, a friend, or hire someone to come once, twice, or even three times during the day to let your puppy out. To ask a puppy to stay in a very small area for a long period of time, without the opportunity to eliminate, is actually going to work against your housetraining. Your puppy will be forced to eliminate and then lay in it. He will then develop unclean habits and not care about keeping himself and your house clean.

If you have a puppy that is eliminating in his crate, make sure he is first, empty when you put him in it, and second, take him out more often. For dogs that really insist on soiling in the crate, you should take away all bedding as well. Please read the crate training literature for more information.

#### IS THERE ANYTHING SPECIAL I NEED TO GET BEFORE I START HOUSETRAINING MY DOG?

Yes. You need to arm yourself with the proper equipment, so you are ready to deal with all the possible situations that may happen. Accidents will happen, but your main goal is to prevent them as much as possible. Obtain the following items:

1. ENZYME CLEANER is used to clean up accidents. It is available at the Humane Society's pet store or any pet supply store. Just make sure you get one specifically designed for urine/feces odors and stains. Do not use vinegar, club soda or ammonia to clean up accidents. These only draw your dog back to his mistake. You will want to make sure you clean up after EVERY ACCIDENT and use the enzyme cleaner in direct proportion to how large the accident was. If Fido urinated about one cup on the carpet, you need to pour at least one cup on that spot AFTER you have soaked up as much urine as you can.
2. PAPER TOWELS OR NEWSPAPERS will be used to blot up the mess after the cleaner has done its job.
3. CONFINEMENT can technically be any place where you do not care if your dog makes a mistake. It is preferably someplace that is safe (meaning he can't get into trouble by chewing up things like the carpet or electrical wires), is inside your house, and is small enough so he tries to hold eliminating until you let him out.

Dogs have a natural instinct not to soil near them or in the place where they sleep. That's why crate training is so successful as a housetraining aid. Some examples of confinement are: a crate just big enough for him to lay down and turn around in, a blocked off portion of the kitchen or another room, again just big enough to turn around and lay down, or a small bathroom.

#### SO HOW DO I START?

**PUT YOUR DOG ON A REGULAR SCHEDULE.** That means his meals, water, play, walking, and training times stay the same, even on the weekends! Your dog does not have an internal calendar telling him it's Saturday, time to sleep late. But he does have an internal clock that is accurate up to 30 seconds within a 24-hour period! All he knows is for the past five days you have been getting up at 6:00 AM to take care of him! See the sample schedules at the end of this section.

Once your dog is **reliable**, you can start to vary the scheduled times slightly until you are back on "your" time.

**FEED DEFINITE MEALS.** Feed only a high quality, dry kibble at regularly scheduled times. Do not leave food down constantly for him to pick at (this is also called free feeding). You need to know when he has last eaten and how much he has eaten so you can time your potty breaks accordingly.

Water can be also offered at regular intervals for young puppies as well, rather than leaving it down continually, or it can be measured out so your dog doesn't gulp huge amounts. It should be offered more frequently on hot days and after exercising.

Remember to confine your dog when you cannot watch him!

#### SO HOW DO I KNOW WHEN THE DOG HAS TO GO OUT?

Try to plan ahead by knowing your own dog's potty habits. Most young puppies will need to go out about 20 minutes after drinking a moderate amount of water; either right after or within 20 minutes of eating, after playing for any length of time, after chewing on a bone for a time, immediately upon waking in the morning or after a nap during the day. Your job is to learn when he needs to go so you can get your dog out to the correct area to eliminate **before** he has a mistake in the house.

Your dog will also try to tell you by communicating through his body language. Your dog will

communicate this to you by sniffing at the ground suddenly, and sometimes frantically circling in place, or stopping play all of a sudden for no apparent reason. Older dogs will often stand by the door leading outside for a few moments before they decide they really need to go and you are not coming to let them out.

Each dog is a little different in his body language when trying to tell you "Gotta Go," so get to know your dog's communications cues so you can get him out on time. Prevention, not correction speeds up housetraining!

#### WHAT DO I DO WHEN MY DOG GETS IT RIGHT AND GOES IN THE CORRECT PLACE?

Praise him generously as he is doing his business and give him a small treat within five seconds of him finishing. Then take him back inside the house and play with him for three to four minutes. Then allow him 15 to 20 minutes of supervised freedom in your house. When you cannot watch him any longer, then put him in his confinement with a few toys to occupy himself with.

**DO NOT SHOVE YOUR DOG OUT THE DOOR AND EXPECT HIM TO DO HIS BUSINESS ON HIS OWN!** You need to go with him to show him where, and to make sure he actually does his business. He needs your help to learn housetraining correctly! Try to always get your dog out before he needs to go. Do not wait until you see him starting to go in the house. Anticipate when he will need to go and get him out beforehand!

#### WHAT DO I DO IF MY DOG STARTS TO ELIMINATE RIGHT IN FRONT OF ME?

Quickly stop him in the act by clapping your hands and urgently saying "OUTSIDE" to him. Then **run with him** directly outside to where you want him to go. Even if you have a small dog, do not carry him out. Use a leash to steer him out to his elimination area.

Do not scare the wits out of your dog as you are trying to stop him from eliminating in the house. If you do scare him you will only teach him that eliminating in the house is bad! If he gets this

idea in his head, then you will start to see such behaviors as your dog sneaking off behind the couch or another room to eliminate. Remember your unhousetrained dog should not be left loose in your house without you **directly** watching him. If you cannot watch him, put him in his confinement area.

Leaving a lightweight leash on your dog while going through the housetraining phase can be of a great help to you. You can use it to gently guide your dog toward the door as you urgently say "OUTSIDE" and use it to help guide your dog to the target area quickly.

Give your dog no more than five minutes to finish his business outside. If he does finish outside, make sure you give him quiet praise as he is doing the act and very enthusiastic praise just as he is finished. His reward for finishing outside, is that he gets to come back inside the house, and you will play with him for at least two minutes (he gets your attention for doing the correct thing) in addition to the 15 minutes of SUPERVISED freedom.

Now if he does not finish outside, he needs to be put in his safe confinement for 15 minutes and then you will take him back outside to try again. Repeat this cycle of confinement and going outside until he finally goes.

A word of caution here. If you know your dog needs to go soon, **do not allow a "LOADED" dog loose in your house.** Just like a loaded gun left lying around, sooner or later it will go off! Your dog will learn faster if accidents are kept to a minimum. If he does make a mistake, look at it as the perfect opportunity to tell your dog, "No in the house, but here out in the target area!"

I JUST FOUND A MESS IN THE HOUSE. WHAT DO I DO?

Just clean it up out of sight of your dog with the proper cleaners. It is water under the bridge at this point, there is nothing you can do about it except promise yourself you will supervise your dog much closer when he is loose in the house.

DO NOT RUB YOUR DOG'S FACE IN IT.  
NEVER TAKE HIM BACK TO IT AND POINT

AT IT, OR SWAT HIM WITH A ROLLED UP NEWSPAPER because the things you will be teaching him is that you are to be feared! Your dog needs to be **CAUGHT IN THE ACT** and immediately but calmly shown where he should be going.

### MISCELLANEOUS PROBLEMS WITH HOUSEBREAKING

Some problems that appear to be associated with housetraining are instead rooted in some other type of behavior problem. You need to know how to deal differently with the following problems:

MY DOG WETS THE FLOOR EVERY TIME I COME HOME AT NIGHT!

This is called excitement urination. That means that when your dog is too excited he wets the floor. This is not a housetraining problem, it is a confidence problem. Some breeds are more prone to this type of problem than others. **Do not punish your dog for this, it will only make it worse.**

Most young dogs will grow out of this behavior, provided you work on actively socializing your dog so he gains confidence. If you know what kinds of situations incite this behavior in your dog, the best thing to do is to try to avoid them or keep them very low-keyed. If Fido only wets when you come home at night (excitement) then try ignoring him for fifteen minutes when you first get home so he learns to calm down before you greet him. When you are ready to greet Fido, do it where it can be cleaned up easily such as on the kitchen floor or outside.

SOMETIMES HE WETS THE FLOOR WHEN I YELL AT HIM TOO.

This is called SUBMISSIVE WETTING, or he becomes so frightened that he wets the floor. Try keeping your voice lower and softer. Or better yet, you, the owner, should learn proper training techniques so Fido does not become frightened of you. If Fido is very fearful of other dogs or certain situations, then try using a very happy voice in those fearful situations and actively work on socializing him to those situations.

MY DOG PEEES ON ANYTHING NEW THAT COMES INTO THE HOUSE, AND WHEN I TRY TO WALK HIM WE NEVER GET VERY FAR SINCE HE IS BUSY PEEING ON EVERY BUSH!

This is called LEG LIFTING OR MARKING TERRITORY. This is an instinctive, normal doggie behavior in the wild, but leg lifting in your house is an attitude problem! Leg lifting is most common among unneutered males, over the age of seven months, or in males who were neutered late in life. It literally means that Fido lifts his leg, pees, and usually it is directed onto something (it is not uncommon for very dominant males to urinate on their owner's leg!). The amount of urine is usually quite small in comparison to the **real** urge to eliminate. It is an act of dominance because urinating on things in the dog kingdom means, "this is mine." Some dogs have an exaggerated ego and believe everything in the house, and down the street, is their's too!

To remedy this situation, first have your dog neutered. That will reduce the urge to mark by about 50%. Secondly, you need to treat him like he is un-housetrained, in the sense that you need to **supervise** him closely!

In correcting leg lifting, you do want to be very stern when you catch him in the act! It is most helpful to keep a leash on Fido, even in the house, until you get this behavior under control. When he tries to urinate un-invited, pop the leash firmly while you tell him "OFF". Do not feel badly that you seem to be correcting a natural urge; remember he did not have to "go" in the strict sense of the word, he just felt like putting his mark on something or someone! He has a bad attitude and needs to be corrected about whose territory this is!

Your dog should not be walking down the street, peeing at every other step on your neighbor's bushes. Besides being most rude to your neighbor's landscaping, your dog is exhibiting dominant behavior. That needs to stop. Simply pop the leash and tell your dog "Lets' go!" **every time** he tries to urinate un-invited. Please give him an opportunity to relieve himself at the beginning of your walk, **but only when you tell him his elimination command.** From then on the water works must be shut off for the duration of your walk.

**Recommended Reading:**

**How to Housebreak Your Dog in Seven Days**  
By Shirlee Kalstone. Bantam Books.

*If you have any questions, problems or concerns please call the Humane Society Silicon Valley's Animal Behavior Helpline at (408) 727-3383, extension 753.*

WHEN OWNER AT HOME ALL DAY:

SCHEDULE # 1

General timetable for **three to six-month-old puppies** eating three meals a day.

7:00 AM Wake up. Go out, short play/training period.

7:10-7:30AM Free period in kitchen, under supervision.

7:30 AM Food and water.

8:00 AM Go out; short play/training period.

8:15 AM Free period in kitchen, under supervision.

12:00 Noon Go out; food and water. Short play/training period.

12:30PM Go out, short play/training period.

12:45 PM Free period in kitchen, under supervision.

1:15 PM Confine.

5:00 PM Go out; short play/training period.

6:15 PM Confine.

8:00 PM Last water for day – then take up.

8:15 PM Go out; short play/training period.

8:30 PM Free period in kitchen, under supervision.

9:00 PM Confine.

11:00 PM Go out. Confine Overnight.

SCHEDULE # 2

General timetable for **six to 12-month-old puppies** eating two meals a day.

7:00 AM Wake up. Go out, short play/training period.

7:15-8:00 AM Free period in kitchen, under

supervision.

8:00 AM Food and water.

8:30 AM Go out; short play/training period.

8:45 AM Free period in kitchen, under supervision.

9:30 AM Confine

12:30 PM Go out; short play/training period.

12:45 PM Food and water.

1:00 PM Free period in kitchen, under supervision.

1:45 PM Confine.

6:00 PM Go out; short play/training period.

6:30 PM Food and water.

6:45 PM Go out; free period in house, under supervision.

7:30 PM Confine.

11:00 PM Go out. Confine Overnight.

SCHEDULE # 3

General timetable for **housetrained adult dogs** eating two meals a day.

7:00 AM Wake up. Go out, short play/training period.

8:00 AM Food. Unlimited supply of water during day.

8:30 AM Go out; short play/training period.

12:30 PM Go out; short play/training period.

5:30 PM Food.

6:00 PM Go out, play/walk/training period.

11:00 PM Go out, Bedtime. Remove water during night.

SAMPLE HOUSEBREAKING SCHEDULES

WHEN OWNER WORKING DURING THE DAY:

supervision.

SCHEDULE # 1

General timetable for **three to six-month-old puppies** eating three meals a day.

7:00 AM Wake up. Go out, short play/training period.

7:10-7:30AM Free period in kitchen, under supervision.

7:30 AM Food and water.

8:00 AM Go out; confine in large area to allow for elimination in one corner and sleep in another, when owner leaves for day. Leave safe toys and chewies to keep dog entertained.

6:00 PM Go out, short play/training period

6:15-6:30 PM Free period in kitchen, under supervision.

6:30 PM Food and water.

7:00 PM Go out, short play/training period

7:15 PM Confine.

9:00 PM Food and water. Last water for day.

9:30 PM Go out; short play/training period.

9:45 PM Free period in kitchen, under supervision.

10:10 PM Confine.

11:00 PM Go out. Confine Overnight.

7:30 AM Food and water.

8:00 AM Go out; confine when owner leaves for day. Leave safe toys and chewies to keep dog entertained – small amount of water available.

6:00 PM Go out, short play/training period

6:15-7:00 PM Free period in house, under supervision.

7:00 PM Food and water.

7:30 PM Go out, short play/training period

7:45-8:30 PM Free period in house, under supervision.

8:30 PM Confine.

11:00 PM Go out. Confine Overnight.

SCHEDULE # 3

General timetable for **housetrained adult dogs** eating two meals a day.

7:00 AM Wake up. Go out, short play/training period.

7:30 AM Food. Unlimited supply of water during day.

8:00 AM Go out. Confine when owner leaves for the day.

6:00 PM Go out, long play/walk/training period.

7:00 PM Food.

7:30 PM Go out, short play/training period.

11:00 PM Go out, Bedtime. Remove water during night.

SCHEDULE # 2

General timetable for **six to 12-month-old puppies** eating two meals a day.

7:00 AM Wake up. Go out, short play/training period.

7:10-7:30AM Free period in kitchen, under