

Housebreaking

Dogs don't understand that we want them to eliminate outside instead of inside until we teach them. Because dogs don't know right from wrong, it's unfair to punish them for making mistakes. Instead, we can create the behaviour we want and through repetition, urinating and defecating outside become a habit.

If after successfully housebreaking your dog it begins to urinate or defecate in the house there's always an underlying cause. To solve this problem it's important to identify and solve the cause of the problem while managing the symptom – the accidents in the house.

Four Rules Of Thumb

1. Every time your dog eliminates in the appropriate area is a step in the right direction – using the appropriate elimination area becomes a habit.
2. Every accident you catch, interrupt and redirect is a step in the right direction because it's a learning experience for your dog.
3. Every accident you miss is a step backward as the unwanted behaviour becomes a more deeply rooted habit.
4. Every accident you punish is a step backward because it damages your relationship with your dog, it's not learning what you want it to do and it will hide when it needs to eliminate making teaching difficult.

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Take Your Dog Out

- First thing in the morning
- Last thing before going to bed
- After eating
- After drinking
- As soon as it wakes from a nap
- As soon as it stops playing and begins sniffing the floor
- As soon as it stops chewing and begins sniffing the floor
- If it begins circling, sniffing, squatting or lifting its leg
- Immediately after being released from a confined area
- If it hasn't been out in the last fifteen minutes

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Housebreaking Procedure

- Put a leash on your pup each time you take it outside and make sure you have a tasty treat or favourite toy in your pocket.
- Take your dog to the door then give your verbal cue. For example: “Gotta go?”
- Wait for your dog to ring the bell if taught through targeting or pick up its paw and ring the bell. If you’re picking up your dog’s paw to ring the bell, each time you take it to the door wait a few seconds after giving your cue to allow your dog the opportunity to ring the bell itself. If it doesn’t, show it what you want. (To teach your dog to ring a bell see page 5)
- Take your dog to the same elimination area each time, as this will create an association that will speed up the learning process as well as making clean up easier.
- Stay in one place to keep your dog from becoming distracted and repeat your verbal cue in a soft voice for up to five minutes. If your dog urinates or defecates, quietly say “good-dog” until it’s finished. Remain calm, patient and quiet because any excitement, stress or negativity will inhibit the dog’s ability to release its bladder and bowels.
- As soon as your dog is finished eliminating, turn on the praise. Give it a special treat and play with your dog for a few minutes. Now your dog can have run of the yard or supervised run of your house. By using a verbal cue until your dog eliminates and rewarding it immediately afterward, through repetition your dog will learn to eliminate on cue.
- If your dog does not eliminate, return to the house. Either keep your dog in sight at all times in order to teach it if it makes a mistake or put it in its crate or long term confinement area. (A blocked off and puppy proofed area with newspaper over the entire floor). Wait fifteen minutes and try again. For more information about creating a long-term confinement area see “*Passive Paper Training*” on page 12.

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- Make sure your dog is in sight at all times when loose in your home. If you can't watch your dog, it should be in its crate or long-term confinement area. Once your dog has emptied its bladder and/or bowels you can relax for a little while but don't let your dog out of sight. While every accident you catch is a learning experience for your dog and a step in the right direction, unfortunately every one you miss is a step backward.
- If you catch your puppy in the act, interrupt it mid-flow with the cue "outside" without reprimanding or startling it. Quickly rush your puppy outside and hopefully it will finish there. If your dog finishes outside, reward it. If not, just bring it back inside. Whatever you do, do not punish your dog!
- In order to monitor your progress put a star on your calendar every day there are no accidents. Begin by taking your dog out every fifteen minutes when it's awake. When there have been no accidents for three days, take the dog out every twenty minutes to begin strengthening its bladder and bowels. If there are no accidents for three days, add another ten or fifteen minutes, and so on, building up to a fair and realistic period of time. This length of time may be different for each dog. Personally, I won't leave my adult, housetrained dogs inside for longer than five hours at a time and even less, as they get older.

By following this pattern, you'll eliminate most of the accidents in your home. Your dog will learn that it's interrupted every time it goes inside and rewarded every time it goes outside, and it will learn how to tell you when it has to go. Through repetition, your dog learns that by going outside it gets uninterrupted release, a reward and attention.

By having your dog ring a bell every time it goes out, you'll open the lines of communication, and give your dog a quick and easy way to earn a reward. When your dog is no longer having accidents in the house, you can begin to reward intermittently, and then slowly eliminate the food reward altogether.

Remember, it's unfair to punish your dog for behaving like a dog. Dogs don't know right from wrong – all they understand is pleasant and unpleasant, safe and unsafe, fun and frightening. By punishing your dog for doing what comes naturally, you'll teach it to fear you. Instead of learning to go outside, your dog will learn to hide in another room when it needs to relieve itself.

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Is Your Dog Trying To Tell You Something?

If your dog has made a positive association with going outside, it will often try to tell you when it has to go. Unless you can read this communication, you'll slow down the housebreaking process. This is why it's a good idea to teach your dog to ring a bell or "speak" to tell you when it needs to go out. Until your dog can communicate with you, signs of restlessness, circling, sniffing, hanging around the door, whining, barking at you or just plain bugging you – is your dog's way of trying to tell you something. Even when your dog is totally housebroken, it's only fair to take it out at least every few hours. As long as it's not an "attention getting" behaviour, take it out whenever it asks.

Points To Remember

- What goes in must come out.

Make sure your dog has no access to food or water at least three hours before confinement or going to bed. If your dog is empty it's more likely to settle down quickly and sleep through the night.

If your dog has to be alone for long periods of time or it's uncomfortably hot, it's unfair to leave it without water or to expect it to hold its bladder. In this situation, leave your dog in its long-term confinement area where it's acceptable to drink and eliminate. If this happens on a regular basis, you may choose to hire someone to walk and spend time with your dog each day, or frequent a reputable dog daycare or even find a more suitable home for your dog. Remember that dogs are social animals and should not be forced to spend long periods of time alone. Although some dogs handle isolation fairly well, many do not.



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Key Points

- Interrupt and re-direct any accidents without punishing or startling your dog.
- Supervise at all times when your dog is out of its safe area.
- Use a crate or passive paper-training when you can't watch your dog.
- Teach your dog how to tell you it has to go. (See below)
- Take your dog out on-leash at the beginning of house breaking.
- Take a treat with you to reward your dog after elimination.
- Give a verbal cue "gotta go?" to teach your dog to eliminate on cue.
- Take your dog to the same place every time to speed up the learning process and make clean up easier.
- Stay in one place until your dog eliminates.
- Praise your dog calmly when it begins to eliminate and have a party when it's finished.
- If your dog does not eliminate, go back inside and watch your dog's every move or confine it until you're ready to go back out again but don't wait too long.
- Monitor your progress by marking your calendar every day you don't have an accident so you know when to expand the period of time between trips outside.
- Make sure your dog has no access to food three hours before bedtime to ensure it goes to bed empty.
- Make sure your dog has no access to water three hours before bedtime to ensure it goes to bed empty. If the weather is particularly hot or you feel your dog needs a drink, allow it to quench its thirst but not fill its bladder or allow it to sleep in its passive paper training area where it's ok to eliminate.

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If You Can't Meet Your Dog's Needs There Are Alternatives

- Reputable Dog Daycare
- Reputable Dog Walkers Or Family Or Friends To Walk Your Dog
- Reputable Dog Sitters Or Family Or Friends To Walk Your Dog
- Find a more suitable home

Teach Your Dog How To Tell You When It Has To Go Outside

If you get your dog outside often enough accidents won't happen. However, there may be times in your dog's life when it will need to let you know that it has to go out.

Speak And Shush

You can open the lines of communication by teaching your dog to bark when it needs to go out but if you have a quiet dog, you may wish to avoid teaching it to bark. Once your dog responds reliably to the "speak" cue, ask your dog to "speak" before opening the door to take it out. (See "*Speak and Shush*" handout)

Ring A Bell

Bell – Visit your local pet store and purchase a bell, the type you would hang in a large birdcage. Hang the bell on a string then hang the string on the handle of the door your dog uses to go to its elimination area. Make sure the bell is low enough for the dog to reach with its paw or nose.



Using The Paw – If you want your dog to ring the bell with its paw begin by asking your dog if it needs to go outside. Take your dog to the door. Lift its paw and hit the bell with it before letting it outside.

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Using The Nose

If you want your dog to ring the bell with its nose put a tiny dab of peanut butter or bacon grease on the bell just before taking your dog out. Ask your dog if it needs to go outside. Take your dog to the door and lure it toward the bell. When it rings the bell with its nose while licking off the peanut butter or bacon grease, the moment the bell rings, use a “YES!” reward marker then open the door and take it outside. Your other option for teaching your dog to ring the bell is targeting. (See page 7)

Doorbell

The cowbell may frighten some dogs and some owners would prefer to not have bells hanging from their doorknobs. For these cases a regular doorbell would make more sense. Mount the doorbell on a piece of wood and fasten it either to the floor or the wall beside your door. You can then plug the chiming unit into any outlet. You can use the techniques described above or targeting to teach your dog to ring the doorbell.



You can use non-stick Command Picture Hanging Strips by 3M to prevent damage to your floor or wall. (See below) For more information about the 3M strips visit: www.apartmenttherapy.com/command-adhesiv-17825.



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Targeting

When something new is presented to a confident, curious dog it will investigate with its nose. To make your target even more enticing, place a small dab of peanut butter or bacon grease on the cowbell or doorbell.

Before mounting or hanging your bell, show it to your dog. When it sniffs or licks the bell give your reward marker “YES” and give it a treat. Repeat until you are confident that your dog will touch the bell each time it’s presented. At this point you’ll wait until the bell actually rings before giving your reward marker and treat.

When your dog is ringing the bell reliably you can begin to move the bell above and below the dog’s nose, to the right and left, requiring it to move toward the bell. When your dog rings the bell each time, you can hang the cowbell or mount your doorbell and repeat the procedure.

When your dog is reliably ringing the mounted or hanging bell add your cue “gotta go?” or another cue of your choosing. The moment your dog rings the bell instead of rewarding it with a treat, you’ll give your reward marker, open the door and take it outside.

Tough Cases

- For tough cases when a male dog needs to be left alone for more than a couple of hours at a time, make sure the dog has been outside to empty his bladder, then apply a belly band before leaving. Bellybands should only be used as a temporary training tool and for short periods of time as they have been known to cause infection.
- Place a small tarp with newspaper on it in the desired elimination area, and apply a small amount of your dog’s urine to attract your dog and entice it to eliminate in one spot. Because all urine will be clearly visible on the newspaper, this will allow you to monitor your progress. If your dog is using this target reliably, it can be gradually moved, inch-by-inch until it disappears outside the door or to a more suitable location.
- Use a faux grass indoor doggy potty. Put some urine soaked paper in the catch tray under the faux grass or create a large elimination box with a tarp underneath and sod on top.

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Crate Training

If used correctly, the crate is a great housebreaking tool. When a puppy is put in the crate for short periods of time, it can inhibit urination and defecation and give you the ability to predict when your puppy will need to eliminate. The crate can also help you teach your puppy to calm down on cue, and help you fixate the puppy on acceptable chew toys. If your puppy will not settle down within a reasonable period of time, soils the crate, suffers from separation distress/anxiety or needs to be left alone for more than a couple of hours at a time, then “passive paper training” is in order. If a dog is confined for long periods of time, the crate will cause boredom, stress, anxiety and/or panic. As a result, the dog may bark, soil the crate or injure itself by chewing on itself or trying to escape.

While trying to escape the crate, dogs have broken nails and teeth and become stuck trying to escape through the bars. Using a crate for long-term confinement is abusive. Imagine how you would feel trapped in a small cell with nothing to do for long periods of time.

Why Crates Help With Housebreaking

As soon as the pups are able to leave the whelping box, their mother begins housebreaking. She begins to reprimand them if they soil their sleeping area, encouraging them to leave this area to urinate and defecate. This inhibits the puppies from eliminating where they sleep and enables us to continue this training through housebreaking.

If your puppy is put in the crate for a short period of time, and then immediately taken outside, chances are, it will eliminate. If it does, you have an opportunity to reward your dog for good behavior. If it doesn't it simply goes back into the crate for another fifteen minutes, then it's taken out again. Once your puppy is empty, it can enjoy supervised freedom in the house for a short period of time before it's taken back outside. This will create an association with elimination and the out-of-doors, and create a habit that prevents your puppy from soiling your house.

Where's The Best Place To Keep The Crate?

Although dogs need to learn some independence to prevent stress and anxiety when left alone, they are social animals and need to spend a lot of time with other dogs and/or people. Therefore, the best place for your crate is in the family room where it can be near the family. At bedtime, the crate can be moved into the bedroom (or you can keep a different crate in the bedroom) for more quality time with family members during the night. Just remember to let your puppy out of the crate only when it's quiet to prevent rewarding demands for attention.

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Teach Your Dog To Like Its Crate

The crate doesn't need to be an unpleasant place for your dog in fact many dogs go into their crate on their own when they want a nap or some quiet time. As humans, we tend to associate bars with prison, but to a dog a crate can be a den, or safe place if it's used correctly. Placing a dark blanket over the top and sides of the crate can help create a den like feeling. If you introduce your puppy to the crate in a stress-free manner at a young age, you are more likely to achieve success. Confining an older dog that has never been crate trained, usually causes panic.

Procedure

- Choose a crate large enough to allow your dog to stand up and turn around.
- As soon as your puppy comes home, set it down in the crate with a warm blanket, something to chew on and the door open.
- Always leave treats and stuffed Kongs® or safe bones in the crate.
- Put your pup in the crate when it falls asleep.
- As soon as it wakes up, let it out before it fusses.
- If your pup barks or whines wait until it's quiet before letting it out.
- While your pup is in the crate, feed it treats through the bars.
- Feed its meals in the crate to create a pleasant association.
- Let your pup out as soon as it finishes its meal.
- Make sure your pup is empty before being confined to the crate.
- Gradually increase the length of time it's in the crate before letting it out when it's quiet.

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Notes

- Be fair, long term confinement can be very stressful on a dog leading to numerous behaviour and health problems.
- Puppies have little bladder and bowel control and should not be left in the crate for longer than fifteen minutes at a time during the day to start.
- When your pup is relaxed and not having any accidents in the crate for fifteen minutes increase the length of time by ten minutes. When that's successful add another ten and continue in this manner up to a reasonable length of time. Personally, I would not leave my housebroken adult dog in a crate for more than four hours.
- Avoid giving your pup food or water before spending any length of time in the crate.
- Use your crate to teach chew toy fixation by leaving your pup's favourite aromatic chew toy in the crate with it.



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From Crate To Run Of The House

The crate was designed as a temporary training tool to assist with housebreaking and to prevent damage to your home while training. They can also be used to keep your dog safe in your vehicle and when visiting other locations. Once your dog is housebroken and chewing only its own chew toys you can gradually wean your dog from the crate and gradually give it run of the house.

Begin by allowing your pup only one room by closing doors and/or blocking off the exit. When using baby gates they need to be high enough to prevent your pup from jumping over them, secured to prevent your pup from knocking them over and the spaces between the bars must be small enough to prevent your pup from sliding through or getting its head stuck between the bars.

Puppy-proof your room before leaving. This means that the only objects left within reach are objects the pup is allowed to chew on. Remove rugs, footwear, objects on counters etc. If necessary, spray everything your pup may be tempted to chew that cannot be removed such as furniture, baseboards, wall corners etc. with a dog repellant.

When using dog repellant it's important that after spraying, you put some on your finger and offer it to the dog to sniff and/or lick if it so chooses. Once your pup has tasted the repellant chances are it won't want to chew on anything with that odor.

Put a comfy bed in the room and a variety of tasty, aromatic, healthy, low calorie chew options. (See "*Chew Options*" handout). If you offer enough options your dog will stay busy with what you've provided instead of looking for other things to chew on.

If something enticing is not available, your pup's next choice will be to dissect something and that could be your walls or baseboards. If by chance you come home and find damage to your home DO NOT reprimand your pup in any way as this will cause stress that will increase the behaviour. Instead, trouble-shoot the problem to eliminate the possibility of inappropriate chewing.

If Your Dog Soils The Crate

If your dog soils the crate, switch to the passive paper-training program. Leave your crate in the enclosed area with the door closed until your dog is in the habit of eliminating on the paper. When your dog has used the paper for three days, open the crate door allowing your dog inside. If it soils the crate close the door again and give it more time before opening it again.

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Passive Paper Training

Passive Paper Training Is Necessary In The Following Situations

- You have a high-energy dog or puppy that will not settle down in its crate.
- Your dog soils the crate.
- Your puppy must be left alone for more than the length of time you have successfully built up to.
- Your adult dog must be alone for longer than it can control its bowels or bladder.
- Your dog continually attempts to escape from the crate.
- Your dog damages the crate, or injures itself by chewing on itself or trying to escape.



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Procedure

- Set up your exercise pen or prepare your room following the directions on page 11. If using a crate inside your confinement area secure the door so it stays open.
- Teach your dog to like its pen or room by feeding it, spending quality time and allowing it to chew its favourite treats there.
- Make sure the entire floor is covered with newspaper to start.
- After approximately one week when your pup is in the habit of eliminating on the newspaper leave three inches of floor showing around its bed as your dog will leave its bed to eliminate on the paper. If your pup does not eliminate on the exposed floor move the paper back an additional three inches each day. If your dog misses the paper spread it back out and start again. Continue making the paper smaller until it disappears.

References

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