



Progressing in Potty Training

We understand. Potty training can be a major stressor and understandably so. You brought a dog into your life in hopes of lifting your spirits and are justifiably frustrated when Fido chooses to lift his leg instead. There are many factors that influence potty training, but the one we must stress above all else is *consistency*. All habits are formed through repetition and practice and potty training is no different. If we, as humans, get to deem what potty behaviors are acceptable, then responsibility of teaching our dogs about them lies squarely on human shoulders.

As mentioned above, there are many factors that influence potty training: physical, behavioral, and even emotional states can make or break potty training at times. Here, we will address many of these factors and ways to circumvent them, or even use them in our favor.

Physical:

What goes in must come out – it's a simple fact of life that all living creatures adhere to, from the largest creatures on the planet to single-cell organisms. Most frequently, people struggling with potty training are simply having difficulty understanding or sticking to their dog's schedule. It is important to note that dogs have a much shorter digestive system than humans and is one of the reasons they can eat raw meat – things like salmonella and E. coli simply don't have enough time to culminate in a dog's digestive tract. This also makes potty training rather simple to put to a schedule.

Do you find that your dog has a consistent time they will eliminate, usually related to a mealtime or upon waking in the morning? Because of their shorter digestive systems, you are likely to find that if you take care to note the time elapsed between your dog eating/drinking to your dog eliminating, your dog's body almost runs like clockwork. In fact, one of the best ways to do just that is to start a chart. Keep track of what time your dog eats, then mark what time your dog poops. Mark the time you give your dog water, then mark down the time your dog urinates. Usually, you will quickly find a reliable pattern that helps to predict appropriate times to take your dog outside, leading to an increase in successes and building up a good habit.

It is important to note that we cannot predict what we are not aware of, so during potty training it is important to be hyper vigilant when offering food or water and to not simply leave it out all day. Water should be offered often, especially at meals and during playtimes – it is important to never deny a thirsty dog water. However, if we become distracted or inattentive and simply leave water out all the time, then your dog might have a big gulp, followed by a few quick laps, then another big gulp a half hour later. Now, we have no way of knowing if we need to be ready for three separate potty sessions or if our dog is saving up for Niagara Falls.



Activity also heavily influences potty schedules. Many pet parents will often lament that their new puppy holds their bladder all night long, yet constantly has potty accidents during the day. While we are often tempted to claim our dogs are doing this on purpose, the reality couldn't be further from the truth – there are physical mechanics responsible for why that is happening. When dogs and humans sleep, digestion greatly slows down to conserve energy that is not needed at that time. When we are active, such as during play, the digestive system speeds up to give us the energy to continue playing. This is why many puppies will hold their bladder all night, then pause mid-run during a play session to pee. It's no different than the struggle every parent feels when potty training their child – when a toddler has to go, they have to go *right now!*

It is important to note that it is not simply enough to take your dog outside every half hour or so in hopes that they will go potty, which is a more old-school method. While this does help prevent accidents, it also quickly increases human frustration – it's not a maintainable schedule. Not to mention, the ratio of attempts to successes is very low. If you take your dog out ten times to potty and your dog does so only twice, that is only a 20% success rate – would you say that's good? Lack of backwards steps does not always mean forward leaps, which is what we are hoping for. With consistent rewarding and praising for eliminating outside, your dog will eventually get the gist of the behavior and you can help your dog learn faster by being more proactive.

One of the best things you can do to get your dog's potty training on the fastest, most reliable track is to be incredibly vigilant and committed the first two weeks or so you have the dog. Start keeping the chart mentioned earlier and keeping track of when your dog eats/drinks in relation to when your dog eliminates. Be sure to factor in activity levels that might influence it. Often, you will find there was a schedule you weren't aware of. When the chart says Fido is due to potty, take him out on a leash and pick one area you would like them to eliminate in and stand there, calmly and quietly, for five minutes. This is important, as your dog's natural curiosity will take over if they are allowed to roam. This is also the root cause of the common situation where a new pet parent has their dog out for 45 minutes with no success, only for their dog to have an accident the moment they are back inside – all the distractions are gone! Five minutes is plenty of time to sniff the sniffs and locate that perfect pee/poo spot. If your dog eliminates, ensure you heavily reward and celebrate *in the moment* (not after they go back inside)! You can take your dog on an actual walk as an added bonus to send a convenient message to him: business first, play later. The sooner your dog does their potty business, the sooner they can get to all the fun stuff!

If your dog does not go to the bathroom, that's okay! Bring them back inside and keep a watchful eye on them for the next 10-15 minutes before taking them out to try again. Don't let them sneak away and have an accident. Be prepared because you might play this game a couple of times before physicality eventually wins out, as it inevitably will, giving you a chance to reward the correct behavior. By potty training this way, you are not only ensuring the fewest amounts of accidents possible in the home, but



able to reward the correct behavior more consistently which will greatly speed up the habit-forming process.

Behavioral:

Behavioral influences are at the very root of elimination for dogs. As you know, a dog's sense of smell is vastly superior to ours. So much so, in fact, that dogs have not one, but two extra organs to help them process it all! The first is called the olfactory bulb that acts almost a second brain dedicated to sniffing, the sole purpose of which is filtering through the millions of pieces of information a dog receives through their nose with every sniff. The second is called the Jacobson's organ, a tiny, fleshy nub situated on the roof of a dog's mouth just behind their front teeth that allows the dog to 'taste' smells, much like how a snake or lizard 'tastes' the air with their tongue. When you see a dog drooling on a spot they are sniffing, then licking it back up, that is the Jacobson's organ going to work. The main purpose of these organs is to identify pheromones and scent markers left by other creatures in their environment.

How does this affect potty training?

Pee-mail works both ways! It would be quite rude to not respond!

Every time a dog urinates or defecates, they are leaving a scent message on their environment. Some dogs do this with more drive, such as males that obsessively lift their legs (though females scent mark also.) So, how can we help with scent-marking potty issues? The solution is a double-faceted one.

First, you need to do what you can to make unwanted potty spots that your dog favors less appealing or tempting. This can be done through proper cleaning with a pet-specific stain and odor remover in addition to pheromone deterrents. You need to use a *pet-specific* stain and odor remover (like Nature's Miracle) because they have enzymes that specifically target the pheromones that draw the dog to that spot. Also the liquid needs to go wherever the urine went, meaning if Fido left a puddle on the carpet, you cannot simply spray the surface – you must use a fair amount of product so that it can soak into the carpet and perhaps even the pad where the urine may have reached.

Once the spot is clean, you can add a layer of protection by using pheromone deterrents such as "No More Marking" by Nature's Miracle. Products like these use pheromones the dog finds unpleasant and wants to avoid. You can counter the behavior even further by using pheromone *attractants* as well in areas you *want* your dog to go potty, such as "Pee Post" by Simple Solution, potty pads, or "House Breaking" by Nature's Miracle, all of which contain pheromones the dog is excited about and wants to add to. Remember, it is not just about preventing an undesirable behavior, it is also about the giving your dog an avenue to succeed so he can learn the correct one!



Emotional:

Perhaps one of the most difficult to solve potty problems you may encounter is the one both you and your dog have the least control over – excited and submissive elimination. This can happen when your dog is over-the-top excited about something or fearful and submissive, both of which your dog has little influence over. These accidents are more often the result of states of emotion rather than purposeful behaviors. Both of these issues require immense patience as well as a great deal of self-regulation on the part of the humans. You have to control the environment enough to set your dog up for success while being mindful not to let your dog go over their threshold of arousal and set them up for failure. If you think you are dealing with either submissive or excitement urination, ask your trainer for the corresponding Behavior Guide.

Right vs Wrong

It is important to note that there is no *one* way to potty train a dog, but there are several pitfalls one must avoid or prepare for when choosing a potty training method. For instance, if you are interested in using potty pads to train your golden retriever puppy, you need to be aware that it won't be a viable solution for long. Frequently, pet parents will struggle to transition their dogs away from potty pads. Why? Well, the dog may have learned that eliminating on the floor is acceptable and used the pad only because the pheromone attractants inside made it the prime spot. When you remove the pad, the dog simply finds the next desirable spot.

Have you ever felt that your dog sneaks away to have an accident, convincing you that they are “trying to get away with it”? Well, you're not *entirely* wrong, save for the perceived malicious intent. Usually, this behavior is displayed by dogs that have been punished, yelled at, or even subjected to a much older method of potty training in which you happen upon an accident, you hunt your dog down, shove their nose in it, and harshly scold them. Let us help you understand why this creates a vicious cycle.

First, positive reinforcement training has been scientifically proven to be the fastest, most effective way of training over and over again. We, as trainers, understand just how frustrating it can be to train a dog and how hard it is to prevent that frustration from bubbling over. The first and most basic, logical rule of positive reinforcement training is this: 'no' does not teach your dog the correct behavior - it simply encourages them to find a way to get around it. Meaning, when you repeatedly yell at your dog (or shove their nose into a pee-puddle) your dog begins to develop a negative emotional response to the need to eliminate. In your dog's mind, they understand it upsets you, yet they cannot stop themselves from eliminating. This causes them to “be sneaky” and eliminate behind couches, then “slink away guiltily because they know they've done something wrong”. They may, indeed, know they've done *something* wrong – they just have no idea *what!* Your dog does not realize that it is not the action they are in trouble for, but the location. With proper potty training techniques, we recommend to heavily



reward elimination outside while properly managing the environment to prevent accidents inside. This way, your dog quickly learns to look forward to performing the correct behavior.

A unique way to help with potty training is to use Potty Chimes, a sash of bells you can hang by your door, then teach your dog to ring the bell when they want to go outside. This is a fun and transferrable potty training aid, so it is especially ideal if you plan to travel with your pets to help establish potty routines in a new environment. A word of caution, however: when you are introducing the Potty Chimes to a dog they are currently potty training, ringing the bells and pottying in the correct place are two separate behaviors. At first, your dog learns that ringing the bells means they get to go outside – but this doesn't help with potty training if your dog has not associated outside with going potty. Only once your dog associates going outdoors with the urge to eliminate will the bells become useful.

Remember, consistency is key to any behavior, but especially with potty training. Be patient, be understanding - take responsibility for setting your dog up for success, and, above all, BE POSITIVE!