

Housebreaking for Puppies and Adult Dogs

Housebreaking should start as soon as you arrive home with your new dog so that you can avoid having any accidents right from the beginning. Before you even enter the house, take the dog to the area you designate as the potty spot (make sure it's not too far from the house). Let the dog explore around (you may want to keep a leash on the dog to keep them in one spot) and when the dog pees or poops, give lots of praise and a small treat.

The following are some steps that to make housebreaking a fast (about one - two weeks depending on the age of the dog) and fairly easy process. You will need to have some time to work on this so you may need to take a vacation if you work during the day.

1. **Crate Training:** A crate is very helpful in housebreaking. It should be big enough for a puppy to fit as it grows with a divider that can move as the puppy needs more space. Remember most puppies cannot be trusted to be alone for the first year since they love to chew, so you may be using this crate for a while. For adult dogs, the crate should be big enough for the dog to stand up and turn around. (See the Crate Training article—www.centerhillschool.com.) When you are not able to watch your dog diligently, leave the dog in her crate with some water. Dogs usually have the natural tendency not to go potty in their sleeping area unless they have been kenneled too long and have no other choice. Once the dog is allowed to soil in the crate, your job of housebreaking will be more difficult, so be sure not to leave the dog in for more than two hours in the beginning. A puppy's system needs to mature before being able to go for longer periods of time between eliminating. You may need to get a pet sitter to come during the day if you are gone long hours. Make sure to take time to play with your dog after she has been taken out of the crate and gone potty. Do not put the dog immediately back in the crate as she may begin to realize that if she holds off peeing and pooping, she can stay out of the crate longer. The crate, if introduced properly and not overused, will become a safe place that your dog will enjoy.
2. **Set an Alarm:** When you take your dog inside after peeing or pooping, set your watch or alarm clock to ring in one hour (longer for adult dogs). When the alarm goes off, take your dog outside to the potty spot and say "Go potty" or whatever command you would like to use (the key is to be consistent). Give the dog about five minutes or so to go. Praise and give a small treat for any pees or poops. If the dog does not go, take him back inside and try again in ten minutes. This takes a little patience, but you will soon be rewarded if your dog is a puppy, as puppies can't wait too long before going potty. Adult dogs may take a little longer before going. Once the dog goes potty and has been rewarded, go back inside and set your alarm for another hour. Soon you will work out your dog's rhythm and know how frequent potty trips need to be.
3. **Establish a Pattern:** Always take your dog out as soon as he wakes up, after he eats or drinks, and when he has been chewing on a toy or playing for awhile. Have the dog walk to the door with you so he will learn the pattern of going to the door when he needs to go out.
4. **Learn the Signs:** Always watch for signs which may indicate the dog's need to go potty. Circling and sniffing are often signs to watch for. If the dog is in the crate, he may become restless and begin to whine.
5. **Nighttime:** A puppy's system is not mature enough to go through the night without going potty. Use a playpen by your bed (or if the crate is small enough to move from room to room you can use that) and attach a bell to the puppy's collar so you can hear when he's getting restless. If you are a sound sleeper or want to keep the puppy in another room, then you will need to set an alarm for no longer than five hours after putting the puppy out before going to bed. Dogs are social animals and keeping a dog, especially a puppy, in a separate room by itself will cause the dog stress. Remember puppies have been taken away from their littermates and are now counting on you for companionship.
6. **Accidents:** Accidents in the house are unavoidable in the beginning. It is important that you do not punish your dog in any way when accidents happen. The dog will only associate the punishment with the act instead of the location and be fearful of going potty in your presence. Instead, gently interrupt your dog and take her outside if you catch her in the act. Rubbing her nose in it after the fact will only confuse the dog and not help in the housebreaking process at all. Make sure to clean up any accidents completely. Blot the area dry and clean with a deodorizing cleanser. Do not use ammonia as it will smell like urine to your dog.

In summary:

1. Establish a potty spot and a command (i.e. go potty, hurry up, etc.—always use the same word).
2. Take your dog out frequently while he is awake, and immediately after eating, sleeping, or playing.
3. Let her walk to the door to establish the pattern of going to the door when she needs to go out.
4. Reinforce your dog with praise and a piece of food when he eliminates outside.
5. Never punish your dog if she has an accident inside. Clean the area thoroughly and keep a closer watch on your dog.