

## Housetraining: Young & Old

### What is successful housetraining?

Quite simply, your dog will not soil in the house or any other indoor area to which you may take him. You might choose to designate a particular area in your yard or deck that is to be his elimination area. Some apartment dwellers may, by necessity, choose to have their small dog eliminate on a puppy pad in the house. In any case, successful housetraining means that your dog will only eliminate in the area(s) you have chosen.

In addition to normal elimination, some dogs may experience an unintentional release of urine which is called submissive urination and some may intentionally urinate on a specific area which is called marking. These two situations will be discussed later in separate sections.

### Why is housetraining so important?

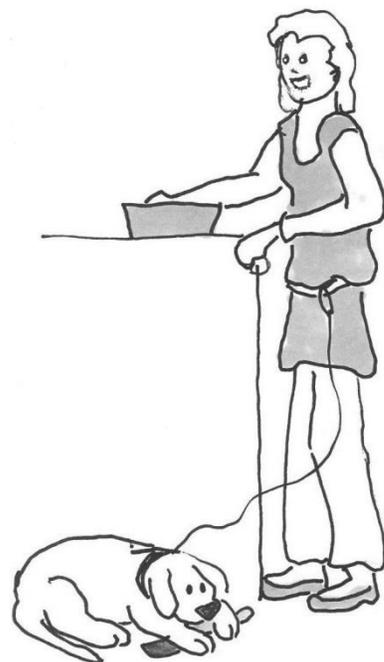
This is pretty self-explanatory. No one wants to visit or live in a home in which a dog has indiscriminately soiled. Besides the aesthetic reasons, it can quickly become unsanitary and it's a lot of work to clean up those messes!

### Management:

The best way to train a dog or puppy not to soil in the house is to be proactive and prevent it from happening. "Keeping an eye on him" is more wishful thinking than a solution. He can dart behind the sofa when you turn your back for a second. Each time he goes in the house it becomes more of a habit and training becomes that much more difficult.

For a healthy dog, the best way to keep things dry and clean is with total management. When dealing with young puppies the easiest and most effective management method is crate training. With older dogs, you can employ a variety of methods of restraint. Remember, you are trying to prevent unwanted behavior. For the duration of the training, your dog should spend every waking minute, 24/7, in one of the following places:

- **Crate:** Use a crate with all padding removed. Dogs don't seem to mind lying on a damp towel, but they don't like lying in a puddle. Please review our **Crate Training** handout.
- **Tie-down:** a short leash attached to a baseboard, or for smaller dogs, to an immovable object. Please review our **Tie-Down** handout.
- **Outside in a fenced yard:** not all day, but for reasonable intervals, some yard time when you are doing housework can be helpful.
- **Leashed to an adult:** Attaching him to an adult member of the family will ensure he doesn't sneak off behind the sofa! Loop the leash around your wrist or waist while you read or watch TV.



With this kind of confinement remember that it's your responsibility to provide ample opportunity for your dog to eliminate at regular intervals. Ample opportunity means:

- The younger the dog, the shorter the interval should be between opportunities. A rule of thumb would be about every two hours.
- If he seems restless or anxious, regardless of the interval time, immediately take him out!
- In addition, you should take him out when he wakes up in the morning, after a long nap, after a play session and 10 or 15 minutes after each meal.

### **Training:**

#### ***Houstraining with Praise and Reward:***

- ***Pre-planning:*** There are some things you can think about before you take your dog out.
  - ***Cue:*** Pick a word or phrase, such as "hurry up!" and use it every time you take him out.
  - ***Rewards:*** Go armed with small but really, really delicious treats, such as bits of chicken or steak. During houstraining is the only time he should get those special treats.
  - ***Personal Preferences:*** If he is more comfortable with one member of the family, that person should take him out. Some dogs are reluctant to go when on leash; others do not like to be watched. Go with the flow on these things, making it as easy as possible for your dog to succeed.
- ***Training Routine:***
  - Accompany your dog outside.
  - Watch him out of the corner of your eye, so that your praise can come IMMEDIATELY after he finishes. If you wait a few seconds, he may think you are praising him for any number of unrelated things, from lifting a paw to scratching his left ear.
  - ***If he goes,*** your praise should be lavish, as if he had just invented the wheel. Then give him several of those great little treats and take him back in the house.
  - ***If he shows no interest*** in relieving himself after 5 minutes or so, take him back inside to one of the management places listed above, and try again in 15 minutes.
    - Repeat this every 15 minutes until he goes potty.
    - Hide your impatience as best you can.
    - Remember to greet success with the same enthusiasm and delicious treats as you would if he had cooperated the first time you took him out.

#### ***Houstraining an Older Dog:***

If you've adopted an older dog, he must have been relieving himself someplace before you got him. If it was always on a certain surface – say dirt or gravel – he may think he is doing what you want when he refuses to go in the place you have selected as his personal bathroom. If he relieves himself when on walks, observe what surface he chooses. If he seems to prefer grass and you want him to go on the bricks in your patio, put a small amount of sod in your patio.

Proceed with the above routine, but when you take him outside; lead him to the spot with the sod. If this works, you can gradually cut down on the size of the sod until it is gone. For the best chance of this working, take your time reducing the size.



***Teaching Your Dog to Ask to Go Out:***

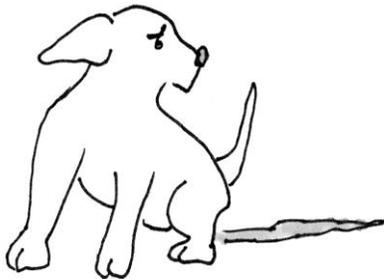
You can also use this training period to teach your dog how to ask to be let out when he needs to go. One simple and fun way is to say “Want to go outside?” or some such phrase. With a treat, lure him around into a spin just before you take him outside. In time, he will associate the spin with going outside and will offer the behavior when he needs to go out.

Alternatively, you can attach a small bell to the door you use to take him outside. Help him bat his paw at the bell when you say “Want to go outside?” then immediately take him out. The more cheerful you are about this, the more readily he will see it as a positive thing. Your friends will be impressed.

**OOPS!**

***How to Handle Mistakes:***

Occasionally a dog will refuse to go outside, then pee on the floor the minute he gets in the house. Accept the idea that he doesn't quite understand yet and resist the urge to scream which may frighten him. He is not doing it to spite you.



If he is still off leash when entering the house, the responsibility is yours for giving him the opportunity to make a mistake.

If he is on leash, it's a perfect opportunity for you to scoop him up and rush back outside. If you catch him in the very act, it's OK to say “Oops” or make a quick intake of air, then scoop him up to take him outside. Be sure to clean up all accidents with an enzyme cleaner, such as Nature's Miracle™, so he won't seek out that spot to go again.

***Regressions Notes:***

During the rainy season it's not uncommon for dogs to regress. However, when a housetrained dog regresses, it is always a good idea to first have your vet check him for a possible urinary tract infection. If he gets a clean bill of health, the sooner you address the problem, the better. You certainly don't want your dog to conclude that inside the house is a more comfortable bathroom than out in the rain. Should this happen, go back to square one, just as if he had never been housetrained. It won't take nearly as long as it did the first time, especially if you catch it early.

***Never Punish Your Dog:***

Elimination is such a non-event in a dog's life that it is forgotten immediately, so punishment after the event, even minutes later, is almost always misunderstood by the dog. He will have no idea why you are so upset. He may conclude that you don't want him to go potty at all, and hide from you while he decorates places like your closet or bedroom. The worst case scenario is that he will decide that you are dangerous and be afraid of you – certainly not the relationship you want with your dog.



***You WILL be Successful:***

Some dogs are very easy to house train, while others are much more difficult. If yours seems slow to catch on, and you are doing all the things you can to help him, don't assume he is stupid. After all, Einstein, though a genius in theoretical physics, had trouble learning to read, but he did eventually succeed. Your dog may never shine in physics or the written word, but with consistent training, he can succeed in the important job of being potty-trained.

**Related Houstraining Issues:**

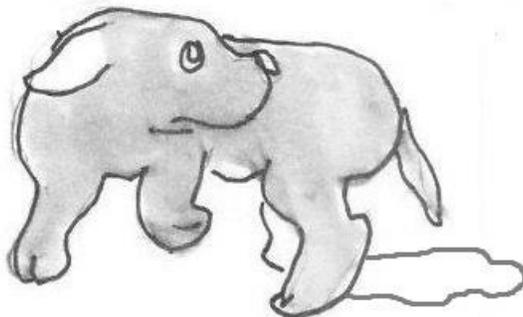
***Submissive Urination:***

Submissive urination is the sudden, spontaneous and **unintentional** release of urine. It is a submissive gesture by the dog meant to convey that he is not a threat. In addition, some dogs will urinate when they are extremely excited such as when greeting new people or dogs, during physical contact such as petting or when they are being scolded. A dog will tend to cower, tuck in his tail and exhibit other submissive gestures before he urinates.

The first step is to rule out any possible medical reasons with a visit to the vet. The second step is **never, ever** scold your dog! It will make the problem worse, not better.

Instead, try these steps to help with the problem:

- Create a regular schedule and stick to it. This includes feeding time, play time, walk time and bed time.
- Build your dog's confidence by taking a training class and teaching him behaviors like sit, down, recall and other behaviors. A class can also help build your bond with your dog so he knows what to expect from you and you will learn to be clear in what you want him to do. When he is really good at sit, use that behavior when he greets new people.
- Greeting Rituals:
  - Make sure greetings by everyone are low-key and calm.
  - If it happens when you greet your dog, try to greet him outside.
  - If you have to greet inside, throw some treats on the floor as you walk in to distract your dog, then ignore him---no petting, no talking, no looking---until he is calmed down, then greet him calmly with little or no physical contact.
  - Make sure everyone in the household knows the procedures for greeting and any other rules for the dog. Consistency is very important.



**Marking:**

Dogs scent mark by urinating small amounts on vertical surfaces, usually while raising a leg. Both female and male dogs can urine mark. Dogs who urine mark might do so in a number of places including while on walks, when in their own homes and yards, and during visits to other locations.

Dogs mark for a variety of reasons:

- Dogs who are reproductively intact are more likely to mark than spayed or neutered dogs.
- Some dogs mark when they encounter something new in their environment.
- Exciting social situations can trigger marking.
- Some dogs urine mark when they experience anxiety.

First, rule out any medical issues, and then try the following:

- Clean soiled areas thoroughly with an enzymatic cleaner such as Nature's Miracle™.
- Make previously soiled areas inaccessible or unpleasant by using something like double sided sticky tape on the area.
- Feed, treat and play with your dog in areas in which he has chosen to mark.
- Consult with your vet about the use of anti-anxiety medications to supplement behavior modification in an anxious dog.
- Try to resolve any conflicts between pets or reintroduce new pets in the household.
- Spay or neuter your dog
- If you have a male dog, have him wear a bellyband.

**Training Resources:**

Marin Humane's **Behavior & Training** conducts various training classes. Sign up on our [Behavior & Training](#) page for the next available class series.

We also provide **Dog Training Instructors** and **Consultants** available for private training or consultations (on-site or in-home) at 415.506.6280 or [OhBeHAVE@MarinHumane.org](mailto:OhBeHAVE@MarinHumane.org).

**Remember to license your dog (It's the LAW)!** If your dog gets lost, a license tag on your dog's collar is the fastest way to reunite you and your dog. Even if your dog is microchipped, a license tag is immediately visible and doesn't require a scanning device to read. For more information about licensing, microchipping, and other services provided by **Marin Humane**, visit us at [MarinHumane.org](http://MarinHumane.org) or stop by at 171 Bel Marin Keys Blvd, Novato, CA.

