

Housebreaking Procedures for Puppies and Adult Dogs: Understanding Environmental Controls

by Andrea Holsinger

To understand how housebreaking is accomplished, one should understand a little about a dog's behavior in the wild. By nature, dogs are pack animals. This means that they are social creatures, and their wild societies have a very ordered set of rules. In addition, dogs are den dwelling animals. In the wild dogs feel very safe in the den area. Also mother nature equipped the dog with instincts that prevent the dog from soiling the den area with their own excrement. As pups, wild dogs will begin to follow their mothers out of the den area as soon as they are old enough. They will continue to return to the same area by identifying the scent.

There are several reasons that housebreaking problems arise in the the human environment. Except for health problems and occasionally extreme temperament problems, housebreaking problems are the result of a lack of proper communication between owner and dog. To begin with, dogs do not understand the difference between the inside and the outside of your house. If left undirected, your dog will choose an arbitrary bathroom spot and will continue to return to the same spot by identifying the scent. Contrary to popular belief, dogs do not use the bathroom inside the house out of spite or anger. Left undirected, most houses are large enough for a dog to choose a bathroom area inside the house that is an acceptable distance away from the dog's sleeping area. Dogs left to roam the house without supervision will soon be soiling the house. The dog will establish a den area and all other areas of the house will be fair game for bathroom activities. Many people try to confine their dog to one room. This is usually not acceptable because most rooms are large enough to establish a bathroom area and a sleeping area in this room.

For those of you who work, some obvious problems can arise during the housebreaking period. Puppies must be shown what you want in a way that they understand. Punishing the dog for accidents only serves to frighten and confuse them. You must control and shape the dog's behavior by preventing the use of the house as a bathroom area. In other words, the key to housebreaking is environmental control. The procedure outlined below will should you how to housebreak your dog successfully without punishment, pain, or suffering of any kind.

Supplies needed:

- one dog (of course)
- one or more owners
- one collar and leash to fit your dog or puppy
- one food and one water bowl
- several chew toys
- one airline type plastic crate (large enough to accommodate your dog as an adult and be able to stand and turn around)
- lots of patience and consistency

1. Any time that you are not at home, or too busy to watch your dog, it must be confined.
2. The dog should be taken out on a leash and collar each time to the same spot in the yard.
3. Paper training only serves to teach the dog that it may use the house for bathroom purposes. Paper training will confuse your dog and you will pay for it later. Stick with outside: it may seem more difficult now, but it will be worth the extra effort in the end.
4. The dog must be taken out first thing in the morning, not 5 minutes later. This includes weekends. It is very important to stay on schedule.
5. The dog must be taken out last thing before going to bed.
6. The dog should be taken out 15 minutes after every meal.
7. The dog should be taken out after a drink of water and after play.
8. The dog should be taken out when it wakes from a nap.
9. The dog should always receive verbal praise for going to the bathroom when you take him out.
10. When you are home, you must keep your dog within your eyesight. Use barriers that prevent your dog from roaming the house. This will help prevent accidents from occurring without your knowledge.
11. If you catch your dog in the middle of an accident, do not punish. Instead pick the dog up quickly and whisk it outside to the bathroom area. Stay out with the pup until it finishes its business, then praise.
12. Do not expect your dog to begin to understand this new concept of housebreaking until at least 4 months of age. If you have an adult dog, expect at least 4 months to pass before your dog will begin to understand.

Introducing your Dog or Puppy to the Crate

Contrary to popular belief, putting your dog in a crate is not cruel or inhumane. In fact, experts have proven that dogs sleep most of the time when the owners are not at home. That is why they are so active when you arrive home from work. With the proper introduction, dogs grow to love their crates. To the dog, a crate represents a safe and secure place. Dog still retain many of their instincts from the wild and a small, enclosed space protects them from other predators and intruders. Many dogs go into the crate to sleep on their own.

There are several additional benefits to the use of a crate. First, the dog cannot chew up the house when it is confined to the crate. Chewing is not only destructive, but also dangerous. All dogs go through a chewing stage which usually lasts until two years of age. This behavior is natural and will disappear when the dog is mature. But if the dog is allowed to develop the habit of chewing household articles, then certain articles may be chewed. The crate prevents chewing on all articles, the owner provides toys that show the dog what may be chewed. Dogs also travel well in crates if they are kept in one at home. When vacation ensures that the dog will be secure and confined in a strange environment.

1. Feed your dog in the crate. Start with the door open and place the food bowl in the back corner. Leave the room. Try this a few days until the dog seems comfortable going in the crate to eat.
2. Begin closing the door after the dog has gone in at meal time.
3. Begin closing your dog in the crate with a few safe chew toys. You may have to help your dog into the crate at first. Remain calm and cheerful and choose a word which you always use when putting your dog into the crate. It is important that you disregard your dog if barks or cries. Do not punish your dog for this behavior. Instead praise the dog when he is quiet and let him out of the crate.
4. Consider feeding your dog in the crate. It is cleaner and most dogs eat better when they aren't disturbed.