

House Training

Puddles and Beyond

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Editor's note: From time to time, we take a look at the subscribership and realize that a lot of the basics we and those subscribers who've been with us longer have read and used are new to our new folks. So, this article looks at one of the most basic of all those basis: housebreaking, and some of the other behaviors we want to instill in our dogs if they're going to live inside with us..



Counter Surfing. Maybe I'll just help myself to a little biscuit while no one's looking.

There are a boatload of books out there to help you with "housebreaking" your dog. Few, if any, go much beyond teaching your dog to relieve himself outdoors rather than on the new carpet. And since there is so much information available about housebreaking, I am going to touch on the important basics, and then we're going to talk about some of the house manners that will make life with your new dog a bit more tolerable.

Whether you bring a new pup into the house, buy an older started dog that will be living indoors, or your previously well-mannered dog comes home after a few months of training, all will likely need a thorough - or refresher - course in housebreaking and house manners. Puppies, of course, don't know any better than to

relieve them-selves in the house. And it is probable that an older, started dog, or your dog that has been with a trainer and has lived in an outdoor kennel, will forget the basics. For all dogs, housebreaking training is basically the same and simply requires adopting a consistent schedule, and only making a correction when the dog is "caught in the act."

I have always recommended the use of a crate for housebreaking. A crate is one of the greatest resources that you can own. It will play a major role in your dog's housebreaking and become his home when he travels. You should begin acclimating your pup to his crate as soon as you bring him home; but if you buy a full-sized crate for your puppy, partition it off so that he can only stand, turn around, and lie down - you can move the partition as he grows. The reason is, you don't want an area in the crate that can serve as his bathroom while he lies comfortably in another part of it.

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Find a spot for the crate where your pup can watch the family activities yet close enough to the outside door that you can get him into the yard quickly. It is important to have a regular housebreaking schedule, but it must conform to your family's routine. What follows below is a good schedule if it fits in with yours.

After your pup has slept in his crate all night, snap his lead on him, take him out of the crate, and *carry* him outside to the area where he is expected to relieve himself. At this point, you also need to begin conditioning him to a command to go ahead and take care of his business. I use the command "exercise." It doesn't matter what command you use, and some people can get creative; but pick one and stick to it. Eventually, when you are traveling and you let your dog out, you can give him the command, and he should know that he is expected to relieve himself immediately. Praise him profusely when he does his business, and then take him back inside.

The reason for putting him on a lead is twofold: First, he can be confined to "the" spot where you want him to relieve himself without running around marking all over the yard. And second it will condition him to do his business on a lead and not just when he is running loose. A dog that is going to eventually travel with you on your hunting adventures must be under control at all times. And, many times, a place for airing him isn't always where he can be allowed to run loose because of traffic or other hazards. Start your pup relieving himself on a lead now, and there won't be problems later on when you might be forced to keep him on a lead.

When your pup is back inside, allow him to romp and explore the house, but keep your eye on him and watch for chewing or getting too interested in certain spots where he may have had an accident previously. When the time comes, feed him, and after he has finished eating, snap his lead on him and *carry* him back outside to the same spot where he relieved himself before. Again, praise the heck out of him for his good deeds.

Head back indoors and allow him to be loose in the house for a while. Remember, when he is loose and playing it is always a good idea to continually keep an eye on him, just in case he decides to sneak off and relieve himself - or finds something exciting to get into in another room. It is always better to head off any prohibited activity and stop a problem before it starts. If your attention becomes diverted elsewhere such as talking on the phone or using the bathroom, putting him back into his crate until you are again able to watch him is probably a good idea.

In the evening, you can repeat the morning schedule of feeding and being carried outside on a lead to relieve himself at his spot. After a couple of hours of playtime, it's a good idea to take your pup out once more before he is put in his crate for the night. Again, this will have to fit with your schedule but 10 p.m. or so seems to work well. Just try to keep it consistent.

A couple of notes: Your dog's feeding and airing schedule should be as regular as possible every day. Dogs are creatures of habit and routine. If he is fed at the same times and taken outside at the same times each day, he will begin to learn to rely on his internal clock to know when these things are supposed to occur. If it is possible don't feed him later than about five p.m., and allow him no access to water much later than that; and if you take him outside to his spot at about 10 p.m. or so, he should quickly learn to sleep through the night without waking you to go outside.

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Creating a "hot spot" on the couch should cure this dog of his deviant behavior.

If your pup does make a mistake in the house and if you catch him in the act, snatch him up and sternly tell him, "No." Then carry him outside to his spot on the lead and praise him when he relieves himself. It really doesn't take long for a youngster or an older dog to catch on to the routine, but remember - your dog's success depends *entirely* on your being consistent!

Now, let's talk about other house training that goes well beyond what is commonly termed as "house-breaking." What I'm talking about is dealing with more serious crimes such as stealing food off of the kitchen counter (also known by the seemingly harmless name of "counter-surfing"), jumping on furniture, bolting out of the door when it is opened, destroying house plants, and/or general destructive chewing - i.e. manners around the house.

These offenses can be much more damaging when carried out by an older dog, but they aren't limited strictly to older dogs. And, you can't train your dog in what is considered acceptable behavior when he has already stolen food off of the counter and wandered off to take a nap. It is necessary to teach and make corrections by setting him up ahead of time and showing him what is considered acceptable behavior. Then, *only after* he understands the correct behavior or what he has done wrong can you discipline or correct him for his deliberate misbehavior.

Conversely, it is often easier to catch and correct a youngster for offenses around the house, and, usually, a simple growling, "No" along with a smack from a fly swatter or rolled-up newspaper, if done consistently when caught in the act, will, after a few corrections, suffice to convince a young pup to reconsider the course his life is taking. An older dog that may fully understand what is and isn't considered to be acceptable may continue to misbehave by sneaking away behind your back, figuring that he won't get caught.

Let me use a couple of examples. Many years ago, I brought a one-year-old Chesapeake into the house that had been totally raised in an outdoor kennel before I got him. His actual housebreaking went more smoothly than I had ever imagined, and his manners in the house seemed to be quite reliable. At that time, I lived in a split-level house with the kitchen on the upper or main level. The first major offense (that I found out about) occurred when I had some antelope steaks soaking in buttermilk on the kitchen counter. The newcomer was the only dog inside and was allowed to freely roam the house, as I felt confident that I could trust him to let me know if he had to go outside.

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After watching some TV shows on the lower level and going outside to light the grill, I went upstairs to get the steaks. I casually noticed that there was a single drop of milk on the counter - but other than that, everything seemed to be exactly as I had left it an hour or so before. But, when I stabbed a fork in the pan to get the antelope steaks out of the buttermilk, the steaks had vanished. My dog was innocently napping on his bed on the lower level - certain that I wouldn't even consider him as the perpetrator of the crime!



Okay, fast-forward a couple of weeks. I had a friend visiting from out of town, and we had made a pan

Always take the puppy out on a leash to do his business. It'll help in the long run - particularly on road trips - if he gets used to going while on a leash.

of lasagna, which was cooling on the counter. From the lower level, we heard a crash in the kitchen above and arrived in time to find my dog enjoying a nice Italian dinner with no attempt whatsoever at hiding his criminal behavior. After a good shaking and a few well-placed swats, he was banished outside for the rest of the evening (while we made more lasagna). But, he had been caught in the act and corrected. He knew that he had done wrong, so it was time to set him up and make a correction that would stop his food stealing once and for all.

Here's another one. I now live in a house with a large front window and often do simple training drills on my front lawn. My helper and I sometimes throw birds for young dogs or teach handling fundamentals right in front of the house. My dogs that live in the house wouldn't think of getting on the furniture - when I am around. But one of the inside dogs simply couldn't handle the pressure of live birds being thrown in the front yard - right under her nose!

So, she determined that it was necessary to get up on the sofa to get just a bit closer view of the birds and that I probably wouldn't notice her up there looking out of the window. Hollering at her from outside had no effect whatsoever, and by the time I could open the door and walk inside, she was comfortably sleeping on her dog bed next to the sofa! So, it was time to set her up and make a correction to curtail the jumping on the furniture once and for all.

For both of these cases, I used an electronic collar to make the corrections. Here's how I set the dogs up and handled each: The dog that was stealing food had been caught in the act, verbally reprimanded, and corrected - so he knew that stealing food was not acceptable. I preselected an intensity level for the collar (this was in the days when the intensity plugs had to be changed on the collar and the collars were about the size of a brick) and let him wear it around the house off and on for a couple of days. I bought a pound of the cheapest hamburger I could find and put it in

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a metal pan on the counter, knowing that when he pulled the metal pan off of the counter, it would make a loud crash when it hit the floor.

After a couple of days with the dog wearing the collar, I put the hamburger on the counter and let him have the free run of the house. From the lower level, I heard him tiptoe into the kitchen, followed by a loud crash. At this point, I pressed and released the stimulation button a couple of times, and he fled the scene as if having been stung by a hornet. I never said a word.

What I had done was to create a "hot spot," and I was relatively sure that after one correction he probably wouldn't go back for another snack. But to be safe, I had him wear the collar occasionally when he was loose in the house for the next week or so, and I put other food out on the counter. One correction had made such an impression that for the rest of the time I lived in that house, he wouldn't even step foot into the kitchen!

As for the dog that was climbing on the sofa to get a closer look at the training, I used the exact same scenario. I pre-selected an intensity level, and she was allowed to wear the collar intermittently for a few days when I was in the house. Then we went Out on the front lawn and threw live, shackled, pigeons for one of the dogs. When she climbed on the sofa for a closer look, I pressed the stimulation button several times in quick succession (with the more modern collar, had she not responded, I would have been able to increase the intensity one level directly from the transmitter), and she shot off of the sofa like she, too, was stung. Again, I had created a hot spot, and she never again climbed on the sofa for a closer look.

This same remote correction can be used for destructive chewing and a whole host of other problems around the house - you just have to have previously taught the dog what is acceptable or unacceptable behavior, and then you need to think ahead about how to set up the scenario for making the correction.

In the case of chewing, give the dog some toys or bones that are acceptable to chew and leave him alone. If he starts chewing on a table leg, houseplant, or anything else that is unacceptable, press the stimulation button and don't say a word. If the correction doesn't make an impression, increase the intensity by one level and try again.

After he has been corrected, encourage him to chew on the acceptable toys. And don't give him a chance to chew on things that are unacceptable unless you can correct him with the collar.

Remember, whether a pup or an older dog, your dog's success depends solely on your consistency. Accept the responsibility for teaching your dog what is acceptable behavior, and then give him every opportunity for success. And correct him only when he knows better and is caught in the act.