

PET BEHAVIOR AND TRAINING SERVICES, INC.

HOUSEBREAKING GUIDELINES

These techniques apply whether you are housebreaking an eight-week old puppy or an older dog. An older dog with a well-established habit of house soiling will usually take longer to housebreak than an older dog that was previously kept outside or a puppy. The rules are simple but they do require consistency and follow-through.

LIMIT FREEDOM

- In the beginning, there are only three places your dog should be; 1) outside with you 2) inside, in the same one or two rooms supervised by you or another responsible person 3) in his crate.
- This approach allows your dog lots of opportunity to do the correct thing (“go” outside) and provides a good way for you to manage his behavior so he doesn’t practice doing the wrong thing (“go” inside).

CRATING

A HOME WITHIN A HOME – the denning instinct

In the wild, puppies are born in a small area known as a den. Even adult dogs try to find a protected area to sleep in. This instinct is handed down to our family dogs. Ever notice how dogs like to get under a bed, end table or other small enclosed area. A crate can provide your dog with his own den. It gives him a place to call his own, and a valuable way to control house soiling and destructive chewing in your absence or whenever you can’t supervise.

Later, when the dog can be trusted alone in the house while you are sleeping or gone, you will find other uses for the crate. Many dogs prefer to ride in a crate in a car. When visiting relatives, the family dog that can be crated is often more welcome than one that must have total run of the house privileges. Many dogs continue to use their crates (with the door open) whenever they want to “get away from it all” and just relax.

WARNING You may want to take the precaution of removing the dog’s collar when it is in the crate to prevent it from becoming caught.

HOW TO ACCUSTOM YOUR DOG TO A CRATE

- As with all training, it is important to make your dog’s experience with the crate a pleasant one. It should be his “safe” place. **Never use the crate as punishment.**

- To introduce the crate, toss some wonderful tidbits of food right inside and encourage him to go after them. Practice this many times. Say “crate up” or “bed”. When he is comfortable going in and out, try closing the door for a few seconds. Offer him a treat through the crate door. Open the door and allow him to come out. Practice this over and over using treats and lots of upbeat praise.
- Gradually increase the amount of time he spends in his crate, while you are busy in the same room. Give him a special chew toy (a Kong or sterilized bone with a bit of cheese or peanut butter stuffed in it). This should keep him happy in the crate. Practice this many times. Start with one or two minutes, work up to 20 minutes.
- Now you are ready to crate him with his special toy and leave the room. Return after a few minutes, open the door. Gradually build up the time he will stay in the crate while you work around the house. Sometimes you will be in his sight and sometimes out of his sight.
- When he is relaxed in the crate while you are working around the house, you can try leaving the house. Return after a minute or two. Say “I’m back” and let him out. Gradually build up the time he will stay in the crate while you are gone.

LOCATION

- Do not isolate your dog by putting his home away from yours. For the dog that likes to be in the middle of things, place his crate in the corner of the family room or kitchen. For the dog that has trouble relaxing in the midst of commotion, try your bedroom.

While this sounds like a lot of training, it usually only takes a few days to a week or two to complete.

FEEDING AND SCHEDULING

- It is easier to housebreak any dog if he is on a schedule. Start by feeding at the same time every day.
- Allow him 15-20 minutes to eat. If he doesn’t finish, pick it up and either save it for the next scheduled meal or throw it away. Leave his water bowl down.
- Try to anticipate when your dog will need to go out. Usually, he will need to eliminate 10 to 30 minutes after eating, first thing in the morning, last thing at night, after naps, after play, after drinking or anytime he starts acting restless.

REWARDS

- The most important thing to do when housebreaking is to immediately reward the dog for relieving himself outside. The best reward is a small, very tasty food treat and your praise. In order to immediately reward the dog you will need to go outside with him, even if the yard is fenced. Keep the treats near the door so you can grab them on the way out.

ACCIDENTS AND PUNISHMENT

- If you see him start to eliminate in the house, startle him a bit by clapping your hands. Immediately take him outside, praise and reward him when he finishes.
- We do not recommend spanking, yelling, or taking him back to the “spot” to tell him “bad dog”. These methods teach him nothing about eliminating outside and may cause him to become afraid of you.
- If he does have an accident inside, clean it up thoroughly with any commercial product made for this purpose, otherwise the odor may draw him back to that area.

HEALTH

If you are following these techniques and are having problems, it is important that you make sure the dog does not have a health problem. Bladder infections are fairly common in young puppies. Worms, food intolerance and viruses are just some of the things that can cause diarrhea. Check with your veterinarian if you suspect a health problem.

CHECKLIST

If you have been working on housebreaking two weeks and still are having more than one accident a week in the home.

Are you:

- ⇒ Keeping the dog confined when you cannot supervise?
- ⇒ Taking the dog out frequently enough?
- ⇒ Always going outside with your dog so that you know whether he has relieved himself and so that you can reward him?
- ⇒ Giving the dog too much freedom in the house?
- ⇒ Feeding on schedule?

⇒ Thoroughly cleaning soiled areas in the house?

If all this seems a bit tedious, remind yourself that a few weeks or months now will pay off in 10 to 15 years of a good companion and a clean house.

If you need more help or information you may call Pet Behavior, 937-293-5686 or talk with your veterinarian.

Pet Behavior and Training Services, Inc.

937-293-5686

A non-profit organization specializing in the behavior of pets