

HOUSETRAINING

By Gary L. Clemmons, D.V.M.

PUPPIES Housetraining a puppy can be very easy if you use proven methods. Before you start, you must be sure you are both physically and mentally tuned in to your puppy. The factors affecting how rapidly you get your puppy trained are its age, its living quarters, the type of food it eats and most importantly, the amount of time you devote to actual training.

OWNER IS HOME ALL DAY

Preventing your puppy from having accidents in the house is the most important thing you can do to assure rapid success. The first few days you take your puppy home are very critical. If you allow your puppy to eliminate on the carpet or inappropriate areas, it will often want to return to this "favorite spot". If your puppy does go in an appropriate area, it is very important to immediately clean the area with an odor eliminating product such as "Nature's Miracle". This will help assure your puppy won't be attracted back to the area when it smells the urine or feces odor. The training method that will achieve the most rapid results utilizes CRATE or CAGE training. I prefer the plastic "airline type" crates because they are easy to clean, light to move around and are very durable. Some people prefer metal cages, play-pens, a small bathroom or even a cardboard box for very small breeds. We will use the terms CRATE or CAGE to refer to any of these types or enclosures.

It is very important to remember, that when training young puppies, crates are to be used for "short-term" confinement. This means you should not leave your puppy in the cage for longer than four hours at a time, especially during the day. Night-time is a different matter. Many puppies, especially those over three months old, can often sleep in a cage all night without having accidents.

You must first get your puppy used to the crate. The first day you should open the cage door and place a soft blanket inside. Next, put the puppy's food dish directly in front of the open door. As the pup becomes accustomed to the crate, place the food dish just inside the open door. After a short time, move the dish to the back of the cage. Once inside and eating, close the door and talk to the puppy saying "good puppy". When it is finished eating, let it out but don't praise it. It gets praised for being in the cage and not fussing. Never praise or let the pup out of the cage if it is crying, because that just reinforces its crying behavior and you are rewarding it for crying. Wait until it has stopped crying, then let it out.

The frequency of feeding, as well as the type of food fed will influence when the puppy has to eliminate. Highly digestible, premium puppy foods make housetraining much easier. With these foods the puppy will require less food because it contains high quality,

highly digestible ingredients. This usually means less stool volume and less frequent bowel movements.

When a puppy eats, there is a "gastro-colic" reflex that takes place. When food enters the stomach, it sends a signal to the large intestine saying. "Get ready to empty out, there is more on the way down". This means that your puppy will usually have to have a bowel movement anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes after eating. This varies with each animal.

I suggest feeding young puppies three times a day. The first feeding, just after being taken outside to eliminate in the morning, the second mid afternoon and the third at 8 or 9 P.M. If you keep a written schedule of feeding times and when the pup eliminates, you should be able to predict when your puppy will have to go.

Because mornings are usually a very busy time, with people getting ready for work and kids getting ready for school, puppies are often left unsupervised. This leads to accidents, because nobody is paying attention to the puppy's signal that it has to go. It then wanders off into the living room to go. For this reason, I prefer to put the pup in the cage during busy time and allow it to eat. It's best if the cage is near the kitchen or the central activity area, so you can hear the cry when it has to go outside. The pup will eat and usually within 30 minutes, will tell you it has to eliminate. Dogs do not like to soil their living quarters. If you cannot watch your pup, it's better to have it confined than have it sneaking off to find a spot in the house to eliminate.

When the pup is in its cage and you hear it cry, open the door, say "outside" and take the pup to the area you want to designate as the "official toilet area". Stand back and wait. Usually the puppy will urinate first then defecate a short time later. When the puppy goes, you should drop to the ground as if the puppy just laid a golden egg! Don't hold back! Lavish it with praise! Once it has gone, your puppy has earned some freedom to play outside for awhile. It has also earned the right to be loose in the house, with some supervision, for 45 to 60 minutes.

If the puppy doesn't go when you take it outside, bring it back inside and put it in the cage for 30 minutes. Then take it back outside and try again.

After being loose in the house for a short time, put the pup back in its cage for some "nap-time" or "time-out". For the most rapid results, you should take your puppy outside every hour and repeat the praise then let the puppy loose as a reward once it eliminates outdoors.

If you go out for dinner or must leave the house for short periods, such as 3 to 4 hours, you can leave the puppy in the cage. This is considered "short-term confinement".

I am a firm believer that one of the best rewards you can give your puppy for eliminating, is a nice walk or play-time, in a fenced area. This will make it much easier when the dog is older and you start taking it for a daily walk. It is much easier to clean feces up in your own yard rather than carrying around a "pooper scooper" everywhere you go.

Some puppies realize that if they go to the bathroom, they have to return inside and do not get a chance to stay outside and play. Going outside for a puppy is like a child getting recess at school. Once a puppy learns this, it will hold it as long as possible, so it won't have to return inside. You soon get tired of waiting for your pup to go and you bring it back inside where it promptly slips away and goes on the floor.

Once a puppy understands just what you want it to do and it has the routine down pat, you should start giving a food reward. I suggest keeping a small, plastic container with your pup's favorite food treats, by the door where you take your puppy outside. When you do go out, take a few small pieces with you. When your pup starts going, slowly move close enough so you can hand it a treat as soon as it finishes. This must be done within one second of the time it finishes. Never call the pup to you to give it the treat because it will think it is being rewarded for coming to you and not for eliminating. Give the food treat, then lavish the puppy with praise. If you have time, let the puppy play for a short time also. You have just given your puppy three great rewards for doing nothing more than going to the bathroom. This is the fast track to housetraining and will accomplish much more than the use of inappropriate punishment when it does go in the house.

Bring the pup back inside and let it be loose for awhile, under supervision, because it has just earned some bonus points for going outside. These bonus points can be traded in for food, praise, playtime and exploring the house. Repeat the routine every hour. The more often you take your pup outside, the more often you can repeat this reward program and the faster you will get it housetrained. It is important to start watching for those little signals your puppy will be giving you, just before it has to eliminate. They may be as simple as wobbling around just after waking up, looking for a more suitable place to urinate, or frantically spinning in circles and sniffing the floor for a spot to defecate.

You can hang a bell from the door handle or a hook, just within reach of the puppy. Every time you go outside, ring the bell just as you open the door. Many puppies will learn to ring the bell when they have to go out. When the pup rings the bell, praise it, then take it outside.

At night time I suggest feeding around 8 o'clock and allow at least one hour after feeding to take the puppy outside to eliminate. If you feed earlier, such as 5 o'clock, your puppy will probably have to have a bowel movement around 4 o'clock in the morning.

After eliminating, place the pup in its cage with a soft blanket and a few select chew toys, but no food or water. Puppies under 3 months of age will often have to be taken out mid-morning, at least until they get better control of their bladder and bowels. If it does soil its cage for 2 or 3 nights in a row, even though you took it outside, you may have to take it out of the crate at night and use long term confinement, at least until it gets better control.

Some people prefer to keep the cage in their bedroom at night, next to the bed. This way you can reach out and touch your frightened puppy that is spending its first night away from its mother and litter mates. Once it accepts the fact it must sleep alone, you can

gradually move the crate away from the bed, a little bit each night. Eventually you can move the cage to its final destination.

WORKING OWNERS AND LONG TERM CONFINEMENT

Long-term confinement is utilized when you must leave your puppy unattended for periods of 3 to 4 hours or longer. Very young puppies, much like newborn infants, have to urinate frequently and will often have 6 to 8 bowel movements a day. If you must leave the house or be away from your puppy for long periods of time, you cannot and should not expect them to stay in a small, confined space and not have any accident. Puppies do not eliminate because they are mad that you left them alone. They eliminate because they have to go and nobody is home to let them outside. Again, if you allow them to repeatedly soil their cage, it will make housetraining very difficult. Please remember, it is cruel to come home to a soiled cage and scold or punish your puppy. They have no idea why you are scolding them. Delayed punishment does not work!

PROPER PUNISHMENT

If you remember only one thing from this handout, please remember this, **DELAYED PUNISHMENT DOES NOT WORK!**

If you are not watching your pup and it wanders into the living room and has an accident that you find some time later, it does absolutely no good to scold it. It may cower down because you raise your voice and said "What did you do?", but not because it knew it did anything wrong.

Rubbing a puppy's nose in its own feces or urine, and hitting or yelling at it, is barbaric and very counter-productive.

If the puppy continually has accidents when it is out of your sight, and you find them later and scold the pup, you will create what Ian Dunbar, DVM, a well respected animal behaviorist, calls an "owner absent elimination problem". What the puppy learns is that every time there is a bowel movement or puddle on the floor, that its owner gets very extremely mad. It does not realize that going on the floor is wrong. The pup knows by your body language and the tone of your voice, it will soon be punished, and it immediately starts shaking. The poor thing knows that when mom or especially dad says, "What did you do", it had better tuck its tail between its legs and run behind the couch. After having its face shoved in a pile of feces enough times, and being hit yelled at, the pup soon learns that it's the feces that makes everyone so mad. It doesn't realize that going on the floor is wrong. Because when it goes on the floor, and no one is around, it doesn't get yelled at. People always say the pup knew it did something wrong because it started shaking and tried to hide. Nothing could be further from the truth. When a pup hears its owner coming home, and there is a pile of feces on the floor, it immediately tried to hide because it knows it's in big trouble.

Because the pup knows feces make its owner mad, it will wait until you are gone to have a bowel movement. This is what "owner absent elimination problem" means.

If you find urine or feces and you did not see your puppy do it, ignore it. If you catch your pup in the act of going, simply say in a loud voice the puppy's name and the word "outside" to attempt to get the pup to stop urinating in midstream. If it stops, rush it outdoors to finish. Never say "No, bad dog". It's not wrong to eliminate, its only wrong to go on the carpet or floor.

For long-term confinement you should select a relatively small room, such as a bathroom or utility room, preferably with a non-porous surface, such as tile or concrete. Try to remove things the puppy might chew on when it becomes bored. Cover the entire floor with a double layer of newspapers. Place the puppy's cage, with the door open, at one end of the room with its food and water. If the puppy has to eliminate, it will usually try to get as far away as possible from its food, water and sleeping area. When you return home, immediately take your puppy outside and follow your regular routine of showing it where it should go and use the praise to reward for a correct response.

Once you puppy establishes its favorite toilet location in the long term-confinement area, you can gradually reduce the papers until you have only a small area, approximately 3 feet square left. Don't forget to leave some favorite chew toys for your puppy to chew on.

If your pup sleeps in a cage at night and continually soils its crate, you should use the long-term confinement area and leave the cage door open. When the pup gets older, usually around 3 months of age, it will have better control. At that time, it can usually sleep in its cage all night.

Working owners will have to utilize long-term confinement when they are at work. When you arrive home, you should take your puppy outside every hour and use the praise and reward method. On weekends, you can utilize the crate training method to speed up the housetraining process. All those extra trips, taking the pup outside will reap tremendous rewards.

PAPER TRAINING

There are certain situations where people live in apartments and do not have access to an area to walk their dog. Other people have physical disabilities or handicaps where they cannot walk their dog. Also, some people just prefer not taking their dogs outside in order to minimize their exposure to fleas and certain infectious diseases.

This method utilizes crate training methods, except instead of taking you pet outside, you simply take it out of the cage and say "paper" and place it on the papers. You wait, and when it finally goes where you want it to go, use the praise and reward method. If it wanders off the papers, simply place it back on the papers and wait. When it finally does go, reward it.

Some people with very tiny dogs such as Yorkies, might prefer using a shallow litter box with newspapers or shredded paper litter instead of newspapers.

OLDER DOGS

Each of these techniques will work for older dogs as well.

Always remember, housetraining can be very easy if you expend the proper effort and time necessary to teach your dog what you expect it to do, where you want it to go, then follow up with a proper praise and reward technique.

Some dogs are easy, and some take a lot longer time to train. At times, almost all dogs will seem like they are well trained and then still have occasional accidents. Don't worry, this I snorkel. Just back up a few steps and repeat hat worked for you before. Then gradually proceed to the next step. Don't get too frustrated, and don't lose your temper or you will frighten your pup and slow down your progress.

Many of the techniques I have described are methods I have used for many years. Some of these ideas have been borrowed from techniques described by Ian Dunbar, DVM, in his various publications.