

HOUSETRAINING

By Alexandra Santos

When you housetrain your puppy or adult rescue dog, there are a few points to consider. Let me begin by mentioning a very important one that relates to a puppy. A very young puppy cannot fully control his bladder and bowel. Usually, puppies gain control over their bowel before gaining control over their bladder. However, there are specific times when your puppy is likely to need to void, and you should be attentive to these times, so that the learning process will be speeded up through adequate training. A puppy is likely to need to void minutes after waking up in the morning, about 5 minutes after drinking, about 10 to 15 minutes after eating, immediately after a vigorous play session, and minutes after awaking from a nap. If you take him to your chosen voiding spot during those times, you stand a much better chance of your puppy soon learning where to void, especially if you reward him each and every time that he voids in the right spot.

Dogs usually do not soil their sleeping area or immediate surrounding areas. However, it is common for rescue dogs to acquire the habit of voiding anywhere, because they spend a great deal of time confined to a small space and, therefore, have no alternative but to void right where they are. So, whether you are housetraining your young puppy or your recently rescued adult dog, the training procedure should be the same. Remember, though, that an adult dog does not need to void as frequently as a young puppy does. The adult dog is likely to need to void upon waking up in the morning, about 20 to 30 minutes after drinking (this is more likely to happen if the dog has taken in a great amount of water), and about 45 to 60 minutes after eating.

What you should **not** do when you housetrain :

Punish your puppy or dog for voiding in the wrong place. Dogs learn through immediate associations, so if you punish even minutes after he soils, all he will learn is that your presence plus the presence of urine or feces results in punishment. As a consequence, your puppy or adult dog will begin to avoid urinating or defecating in your presence. So, it should come as no surprise if your dog : a) begins to void in secluded places or porous surfaces (including carpets, cushions, sofas, or beds); b) voids when you are not around; c) refuses to void in front of you even if you happen to be in your chosen voiding spot. Furthermore, punishment has serious detrimental effects. Firstly, it may teach the dog what **not** to do, but it certainly won't teach him what to do. Secondly, punishment may lead to anxiety related problems and one of those problems is excessive voiding (a stress response to punishment). So, the more you punish your dog for inappropriate voiding, the more he will void out of stress – in the end, you will be exacerbating the very behavior that you want to extinguish. Thirdly, punishment is frequently generalized to the person who punishes. In other words, not only is punishment an aversive stimulus, but the person who perpetrates it becomes an aversive stimulus too! So, believing that your dog knows he did wrong because he hides away or looks “guilty” when you return home, is a misconception. The truth is that the dog has learned that your arrival home is a predictor of punishment.

What you should **do** when you housetrain :

- 1) Wash the soiled area with an enzymatic product (bleach and ammonia based products contain odors very similar to urine, so are not recommended) and apply an odor neutralizer.
- 2) Take your puppy or adult dog to your chosen voiding spot at those times when he is likely to need to void.
- 3) Should you catch your puppy/dog in the act of voiding in the wrong place, swiftly but gently guide him to the adequate spot, and reward him for finishing voiding there.
- 4) Bear in mind that voiding is intrinsically reinforcing (the relief that follows voiding), so you should reward your dog each and every time he voids in the right spot.
- 5) Bear in mind that behaviors that are reinforced (or rewarded, if you prefer) tend to repeat themselves in future. So, if voiding in the right spot leads to a stronger reward than voiding anywhere else, your dog will learn to prefer voiding in that spot. Even if he is a very young puppy, he will learn to ask you to allow him access to that spot (scratching the door, sitting by the door whining, etc.).
- 6) Reward your dog **immediately after** he has finished voiding, and not while he is voiding. If you reward while he is voiding, you run the risk of him interrupting voiding and focussing on the reward you have for him, and the result is likely to be him finishing emptying his bladder or bowel indoors.
- 7) Confining your dog to a crate overnight, may aid in the training process. Take care, though, in case your dog is a very young puppy, not to have him crated during the entire night. It is preferable to get up once or twice during the night and to take him to the proper voiding spot in case he needs to void.

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