

The Potty Wars, Part II

TROUBLE-SHOOTING ELIMINATION PROBLEMS

The *Potty Wars, Part I*, outlined Housebreaking 101, stressing the importance of the Three Cs: Consistency of schedule, Confinement to a training crate when alone, and Cleaning up accidents with an enzymatic odor neutralizer. Part II addresses four complaints often heard when the Potty Wars continue to rage.

I. "My dog eliminates in her crate."

There are two common causes for crate soiling. First, the crate may be too large for current housebreaking purposes, thus allowing your dog to soil at one end and lie high and dry at the other. Second, bedding in the crate may be acting like a diaper, wicking offensive waste and moisture away.

The solutions are easy! If the crate is too large, reduce its size with a barrier that blocks off excess room. The pup should have just enough room to stand up, turn around in a circle and stretch out. As for bedding, your dog must earn it by keeping her crate clean for approximately seven days. When she accomplishes that, add thin bedding, such as a sheet or worn towel. If that too stays clean, then you are safe to add whatever bedding you like.

Make sure you do not have unrealistic expectations and are not crating the pup for too long a stretch. And, if the problem stems from behavior learned during an extended stay at a pet shop, you will probably need to work hands-on with a professional trainer to develop a customized protocol.

II. "No matter how long we stay outside, my dog waits until we are home to soil."

This problem is common in urban dogs who were paper-trained until they were fully immunized. Most folks paper-train by putting down papers in one spot, taking the puppy to the spot until the dog seems to "get it," then leaving the dog in peace to eliminate. The puppy learns that housebreaking means going to a particular place in private to soil. The papers are almost incidental. Avoid this problem by simulating outdoor walking habits indoors. Put down the papers on a schedule instead of leaving them out constantly, and place them in different places instead of always the same spot. Take your pup to the papers on leash, teaching her a toileting command such as "Do your business," and praise her for a job well done. This routine easily transfers to walks outdoors.

III. "My dog keeps me outside for hours before he goes!"

Some folks walk their pups just until they eliminate and then promptly turn around and head for home. In no time, dogs learn that they can extend the fun only if they can "hold" themselves. A walk should be the reward for soiling. When you leave your home, take your dog immediately to a suitable toileting spot, such as a lamp post, patch of grass, or curb in front of a fire hydrant. It's help-

ful if this is a spot other dogs use. Issue your potty command. Circle the spot with your dog for five minutes, ten minutes tops. If he urinates, praise and go play. If he holds, go right back in and crate him. Try again in an hour or two. Before you know it, you should have a dog who will eliminate on command in his spot.

IV. "My dog was housebroken, but when he turned nine months old, he started baptizing the sofa near the window."

As a male dog matures and begins to lift his leg, he marks his territory, leaving scent cues for other canines. Consider castration, since an unneutered male is more likely to engage in marking behavior than a neutered one. A well-timed verbal correction when he is lifting his leg is helpful, too. Confinement will once again be necessary when he is alone until the problem is resolved.

The Potty Wars too often make adversaries of dogs and their caretakers. It should be a battle waged together, on the same side, because the spoils of this war—a clean and dry home—spell victory for all parties concerned.



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