

The Potty Wars, Part I

THE THREE CS OF HOUSE-TRAINING YOUR PUP

In an ideal world, puppies come from a highly reputable source, where someone lovingly keeps the litter area clean at all times. The new caretaker has a fenced-in yard to which no other dogs have access and a stay-at-home schedule that allows frequent potty trips to that yard. Under these circumstances, most dogs are housebroken in only a few weeks. However, most of us live in the Real World.

Real People, Real Pets

In the real world, our puppies may have spent enough time in a second-rate facility, puppy mill, or pet shop to become accustomed to lying in their waste, which makes crate training difficult. We may hold jobs that preclude a schedule compatible with a puppy's developmental needs, or live in housing without fenced-in yards, thus forcing us to paper-train until our pups are fully immunized. The further a lifestyle varies from the ideal, the greater the challenge housebreaking is.

Real world house-training requires a strategy based on three components:

Consistency: a consistent walking schedule catered to the dog's developmental stage and individual preferences

Confinement: a method that helps build bladder and bowel control

Cleaning: a good enzymatic odor neutralizer to clean up accidents

Pencil Him In

What is a suitable schedule? Puppies can control themselves roughly one hour for each month of age, up to nine or ten hours. At three and a half to four months, they can usually stay clean for six to seven hours overnight, but eliminate more frequently during the day. Three walks a day is fine for most dogs eight months or older.

A puppy usually needs to eliminate after waking, eating, and exercising. Charting his output will help you predict his needs more accurately. Does he soil five or fifteen minutes after dinner, two or ten minutes after waking?

Hold It!

For the first few weeks in a new home, a new puppy may seem like a pee-and-poop machine, but as he matures and develops muscle tone, he will learn to control himself for longer periods between potty trips. Confinement, preferably in a training crate, builds control by associating the pup's distaste for soiling in his special area with soiling inside the house in general. It is patently unfair to

crate a pup for longer than he is physically able to control himself. In these cases, confine him to a small space such as a bathroom or kitchen with papers at one end and a bed and toys at the other. It slows the house-breaking process and confuses the dog a bit, but it is the best option, short of hiring a pet sitter, if no one can be home with the puppy during an average work day.

Whether using papers or a yard, the pup should wear a leash and collar and remain under your control. If you don't acclimate the pup to your presence while he's relieving himself, you may create a dog who won't soil in front of you but waits until he's back in the house and can disappear behind the sofa or under the dining room table. Do not allow puppies access to carpeting, especially wall-to-wall, when it nears time to eliminate, for they often return to and reanoint accidents here. Should an accident occur, get out the odor neutralizer immediately and clean, clean, clean.

For the average dog, that's really all there is to house-breaking—well-timed walks, confinement, and a good cleaner when all else fails. It sounds so simple; but if it were, related problems wouldn't be rated number one on our Behavior Helpline hit parade.

For some pups, the three basics just aren't enough. Part II of "The Potty Wars" will offer extra help for people with problem dogs.



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