



## The Common Sense Guide to Potty Training

*So you've adopted a new dog, now what?!*

Housebreaking involves what I call **preventive** training, not **corrective** training. Meaning that it should be your goal to prevent your dog from going to the restroom in the house as opposed to correcting the behavior after it occurs. The golden rule with potty training: The more consistent and disciplined *you* are, the quicker more reliable *your dog* will be at housetraining.

It's important to think about potty training from the dog's prospective. If you have to go potty, you go potty. What's wrong with that? It is not just an innate instinct to prefer grass to carpet. So how can you explain to your new dog that pottying outside is what is expected? We will review a few important steps you must do in order to have a successfully housetrained dog.

Remember that you have to keep in mind that if a dog has to go to the restroom, it's going to go wherever it is, unless it has been taught otherwise. This means that if you are cooking in the kitchen and your dog is wandering through-out the house, starts sniffing the floor and goes potty, she won't understand that this behavior was wrong. So with this in mind the only way to keep you dog from going potty inside (until she is trained) is to, **first; watch her every second and, second; confine her when you can't.** Sounds impossible? It's not.

**First, what do I mean when I say to watch her every second and how do you do it?** In my living room, if I sit on my couch I can see the whole living room except for behind the loveseat, which also leads down the hallway, and the kitchen. So when I allowed Douglas (a foster puppy I was potty training) to play with us in the living room and wanted to make sure that I could see him at all times, I would push the loveseat back against the wall which also blocked the entrance to the hallway. Now Douglas couldn't sneak behind the couch or down the hallway to go to the bathroom. If I noticed him wandering into the kitchen, I would simply call him back into the living room.

Now that he was always in my line of vision, I wouldn't have to watch his every move but I could easily notice if he began sniffing or doing the slow "potty walk." (If it is a toy breed, you may have to "watch every second.") Also, if at any time he laid down for a nap as soon as he woke up I would take him directly outside. This also gave me the opportunity to look for any clues he may begin to give when he did have to go. Douglas would simply walk from one door to the other. If I noticed this I brought him right outside. This also helped him to understand that just by walking up to the door, I would open it for him. Other dogs may have different signs, some easier to read than others; whining, barking, maybe even scratching at the door. As you learn about your dog you will also learn his or her "potty signs."

**How do you respond when you dog does have an accident in the house?** If you are ever catch your dog in the process of going potty indoors, you'll want to respond by giving a very firm "NO! NO!" With most dogs this will actually be enough to stop them in the act. Then, very unceremoniously, bring your dog outside and repeat in the normal upbeat voice, "Go potty." Unfortunately many times you won't notice until after the deed is done. Well, despite the old school philosophy that says to put their nose in it and then punish them, this is *not* the proper way to respond. Doing so will make potty training a very negative process for your dog and will put you many, many steps behind. I cannot stress enough that the only thing you can do at this point is to make sure you thoroughly clean-up the mess with an animal specific cleanser.

**Second is figuring out how to confine your dog so that you can ensure no accidents will happen when you can't watch.** Again, let's take a look at how dogs think. Most dogs instinctively will not eliminate where they sleep.

Doing so would attract predators to their den. So you need to create a place for them that is their bedroom. Crates are perfect. "Crate training is so mean, how can you keep your dog in that little space?!" Can you guess I've heard this a few times? I think the exact opposite; How can you *not* give your dog their own space, their own bedroom. Dogs need to have a space that they know is theirs. You'll find that they will really begin to enjoy their crate. If we're talking instincts let's not forget about the use of dens by wild dogs. Be careful though, you want a space just big enough for them to stand up, turn around and lie down. Anything bigger will allow them to go potty on one end and sleep on the other. If you have a small puppy that's going to turn into big dog and you want to purchase a crate that will be large enough when she's full grown, there is a trick you can do. Simply find a box (I used a large plastic storage box) that will take up the extra room in the crate, change it out or remove it when the extra room is needed. We even sell large crates that come with dividers so that the crate can grow with your puppy.

**Let's make sure that the crate is always a positive place for your dog.** Occasionally feed your dog in the crate. You'll want to have a command for going into the crate. With Douglas I would say, "Go to bed." Then I would throw a treat into the crate, he would run in after the treat. Then I would shut the door, open it and say, "Good Boy!!" and he would run back out like it was a big game. Then the next time when he had to go into the crate for a while, it wouldn't be so bad. I also bought him a special crate-treat. His crate-treat was a hard bone filled with peanut butter (Kong toys filled with goodies or peanut butter or longer lasting rawhide chews work great, too.) Douglas only got his crate-treat when he was actually in his crate. It gave him something to look forward to as well as something he could chew while I was away. Remember this is *only* given to him when he is in his crate or it won't be special.

After Douglas spent time in the crate I made sure to take him outside to go potty immediately. I was careful not to let him run around first, running the risk of him going potty before he made it outside. Some people may even have to carry their dog to the door or put a leash on them if they don't learn to run directly to the door. With Douglas, as soon as I opened the crate door I would say, "Let's go potty!" and begin running outside. He would chase me out the door until eventually he could beat me outside.

Adult dogs will eventually be able to stay in the crate for at most eight hours at a time, with puppies, however, you'll want to limit crate time to no longer than four hours; two hours for younger puppies.

**So now that you understand what I mean when I say to make sure to watch your dog at all times or confine them, let me give you some examples:**

- I've let Douglas go potty and now I need to take a shower. I'll either shut Douglas into the bathroom with me or put him into his crate.
- I need to do office work on my computer, which will keep me focused for a while. If I've had a chance to tire Douglas out, then I'll hook him to a leash and attach it to my chair. That way he won't be able to get too far out of my sight and I'll easily notice if he needs to go outside. It will also teach him to lie quietly whenever I have to do work.
- I want to lay down for a nap, so I'll move his crate into my room and encourage him to nap as well or I'll let him sleep with me so that I'll notice the second he wakes up and needs to go to the restroom.
- I needed to straighten up around the house and knew I wouldn't be in the same room for long, so I attached a six foot leash to my belt loop and hooked it onto Douglas's collar. It took him a minute and then he realized that he needed to pay attention so that he could follow me around the house. I still was able to have both hands free to clean. (A bonus of this exercise is teaching your dog to pay attention anytime he is on the leash.)

**What if you run into problems when trying to crate-train?** Sometimes people will ask for my advice with common problems associated with crate-training. The first and most common is, "My dog whines and barks as soon as I put him into his crate. I have to take him out because he is too loud." Dogs are very good at training people. In this case, the dog has trained the owner to let him out as soon as he starts to cry, so he will continue to do so until he

gets his way. Dogs have to learn to have patience. It is very important that you allow your dog to work things out on his own. As long as you know he has recently gone potty and that he is not being hurt then it will do no harm to allow him to bark or whine until he settles down. This usually will only last a few days or so. Neighbors are generally tolerant of as long as it doesn't continue, being strict at the beginning will ensure that it won't. Also, don't forget your dog's crate-treat. (Another thing that works with neighbors is a card letting them know what you are trying to do and telling them to let you know if it becomes too much of a nuisance.)

Another problem is when a dog does go to the restroom inside of the crate. When this happens you'll want to look at a few things; is the crate too big? Remember it should only be big enough for them to stand up, turn around and lay down. Did you leave your dog in the crate for too long? Though I mentioned that puppies should be able to stay in their crate for at least four hours, some puppies may not be able to hold it for that long, which means more frequent potty breaks. This may mean late nights and early mornings. Finally, you'll want to make sure your dog doesn't have any health problems that may be the root of the problem. Check with your vet to make sure.

**It is important to implement the same routine whenever you take your dog outside.** With Douglas I would always take him to the same place and made sure to say, "Go potty." Eventually, when we were inside and I would say "Let's go potty!" he would run to the door. Once I took him outside, I wouldn't allow him to come back in until he went to the restroom. (In case you have a fenced in backyard and you just let your dog outside unsupervised be sure to watch to make sure they actually are going to the restroom once they are outside.) You'll want to keep an eye on bowel movements so that you'll know when to expect your dog to need extra time outside. Most dogs actually get on a pretty regular routine.

**Okay, obviously you don't want to have to keep up with this strict regimen forever, so how can you begin to allow your dog some freedom while inside?** This is when it is important for you to have paid attention to your dog's potty routine and how well he or she did when allowed playtime indoors. If you have gotten your dog to the point of zero accidents while indoors under supervision you will be able to slowly allow more freedom. Start off very cautiously, however, even one or two accidents can put you many steps behind. When you do start this expanded freedom, it is imperative that before you do so you make sure that your dog has eliminated outside. Be careful not to allow too much freedom right away. You'll simply want to slowly enlarge the area of the house that your dog is granted access to. Even once your dog is able to have the whole house to play in when you are home, still do not assume you can leave him or her out when you gone. I recommend keeping your dog in the crate until she is at least one year old. Some dogs don't mature enough for total freedom until two years old; some...never. Remember, the crate is not a bad thing no matter how long you have to use it. Wouldn't you rather come home in a good mood and happily greet your waiting dog, than to come home to a house covered in urine and your favorite shoes chewed. Then you are upset, mad at your dog and hold a grudge for the rest of the evening, not being able to enjoy the company of your favorite furry companion.

If at any point after your dog has gained freedom, whether it be weeks or years down the road, he starts having accidents in the house, simply go back to square one. You won't have to repeat all the steps for as long as the first time, but you will have to go back to the strict supervision or confinement rule. When my female Dalmatian was 9 years old and completely housetrained I came home 3-5 times to find that she had gone to the restroom in the kitchen. Knowing that it wasn't a medical problem, the next time I left for work, I pulled out the old crate and put her in it before I left. I only had to do this for a week and I haven't had any accidents since.

**Let's review:** Remember to keep in mind that dogs will only know what you teach them and it is your job to let them know where they are expected to go potty. The main objective: preventing accidents from ever occurring. The method: supervision or confinement. Consistency, persistence and strictness are required to making training successful.