



The Common Sense Guide to Potty Training

So, you have a new puppy, 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 potty 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 and more reliable *your dog* will be at housetraining.

Let's think about potty training from the dog's perspective. If you have to go potty, you go potty. What's wrong with that? It is not an innate instinct to prefer grass to carpet. This means that if you are cooking in the kitchen and your dog is wandering throughout the house, starts sniffing the floor and goes potty, she simply didn't understand that this behavior was wrong. So how can you explain to your new dog that pottying outside is what is expected? You do this by setting up a routine of pottying outside so consistently that it becomes a habit. This means setting up an environment and routine that encourages going outside and completely prevents pottying inside.

The main strategy

- Confine your new pup to a crate when you are unable to directly supervise.
- To allow free time in the house keep the following in mind:
 - Only allow when you can directly supervise your pup; you'll be watching for signs that the pup needs to go potty so you can take immediately outside.
 - Only allow free time when the puppy has recently gone potty outside.
 - Keep free time very short initially.
 - Keep free time area very small, only gradually increasing the size as the pup ages and gets more secure at pottying outside.

What does direct supervision look like?

Directly supervising a pup means you are actively watching the puppy so you can specifically manage any behaviors you are working on. Because you are watching for subtle cues that the pup needs to potty, your attention cannot be divided with other tasks such as cooking, watching a video, etc. The younger the puppy the smaller your indoor supervised play area should be. You can use baby gates, puppy pens, and even furniture to block off certain areas. I call these little contained areas "puppy zones". A bathroom can also be a puppy zone. Remember, these are areas where the puppy will only be when you are with her, at least initially.

Now that she will always be in your line of vision, you will watch for any signs that the puppy needs to go potty, aka the "potty walk", walking slowly and sniffing the ground. Also, if at any time she falls asleep, you'll see as soon as she wakes up and can take her directly outside. **Always take your puppy for a potty break immediately after she wakes up.** This will also give you the opportunity to look for any clues she may begin to give when she does have to go. One puppy might simply walk close to the door, another might do a little whine, or maybe head to the same spot each time. If you notice any of these signs, bring her right outside. This will also help the puppy to understand that just by walking up to the door (or whatever the signal), you will let her outside.

Here are a few examples of ways you can supervise your new puppy during your day.

- If your focus will be distracted by working on the computer or watching tv, you could put your puppy on a leash to keep her close by. You'll be able to see if the puppy starts to get antsy, trying to walk away, or sniffing the floor, all signs she may need to go outside.
- Taking a shower? If your pup is very young, going into the crate will be the best option. As your puppy gets older, and if she has recently gone potty, you could shut her into the bathroom with you so she's in a smaller space and less likely to wander around looking for a place to go potty.
- **IMPORTANT:** If you have several members of your family, assign one person as the supervisor during free time so people don't assume someone else is watching the puppy when actually no one is.

If you catch your dog in the actual process of going potty indoors, you can try to quickly walk to them to pick up but only if you walking towards them has caused them to stop peeing/pooping. If not, then do not scold your puppy. You don't want to introduce any fear or negativity with pottyng. Wait until they finish then take outside like you normally would. Always clean up messes well with a cleaning product specifically designed for dog potty accidents.

Unfortunately, many times you won't notice until after the deed is done. 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 and access what you should've done differently to set your pup up for success. Dogs do not understand punishments that happen after the time of the incident. This has been proven numerous times in various studies. People can elicit the "guilty" behavior from a dog by simply having poop on the floor or a pile of trash, even if the dog did not participate in the act.

Successful crate training

Most dogs instinctively will not eliminate where they sleep, which is why crate training is a vital house training tool. Most dogs really enjoy the safety and comfort of their crate. When selecting a crate, 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. You can even find large crates that come with dividers so that the crate can grow with your puppy.

Make sure that the crate is always a positive place for your dog. Occasionally feed your dog in the crate or save special treats for only when going in. You'll want to have a command for going into the crate. I normally say, "Go to bed." One thing you can do is throw a treat into the crate for the puppy to run in after. Then you can shut the door, open it and say, "Good Boy!!" and let the puppy run out again like a big game. Then the next time your puppy has to go into the crate for a while, it won't be so bad. You can also buy a special crate-treat. Hard bones filled with peanut butter, Kong toys filled with goodies or peanut butter, or longer lasting jerky chews work great. You can save this treat to use only when your pup is actually in his crate. It will give them something to look forward to as well as something to chew when you're away.

After your pup spends time in the crate, make sure to take her outside to go potty immediately. Be careful not to let your puppy run around the house first; you'll run the risk of the puppy going potty before making 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. For me, as soon as I open the crate door for young pups, I say, "Let's go potty!" and begin running outside. Puppies will normally chase me outside. The absolute best idea is to put a leash on your puppy even if you have a fenced in backyard and walk them directly to the area you would like them to use. My back yard has both a large grassy area and large pine straw areas. I teach my dogs to use the pine straw areas.

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.

Crate Training Issues

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". Keep in mind that puppies newly away their mother have been instinctively barking and whining when away from her since birth. It's a matter of survival. They have to transition from the helpless puppy that relied solely on mom, to a puppy that knows he is safe even when alone. This is sometimes difficult, but we can help. First, make sure your puppy has recently gone potty and had a good bit of attention and interaction before going into his crate. For brand new pups, I like to keep the crate close to me at bedtime. I can reach my fingers through the crate door for reassurance, and they receive some comfort just by being near me. After the first few nights, if your pup is upset, whining and barking, wait to open the door when there is a tiny moment of silence. It doesn't have to be long, maybe the pup just got distracted by someone else walking in the room, that's okay. It's rewarding the quiet behavior. The quiet times will get longer and longer. You can also toss a treat into the crate during quiet moments instead of opening the door. It all depends on how much time you have to devote to training at that moment.

If your puppy whines in the middle of the night obviously needing to go potty, you'll want to make this potty break as boring and non-rewarding as possible. Without speaking, take puppy out of the crate, attach the leash, carry puppy to the appropriate area in the yard and put down. NO TALKING. NO PETTING. When the puppy goes potty DO NOT PRAISE. This will be one of the only times that you will not want to praise your puppy for pottying outside. Once they potty, pick the puppy up and bring right back to the crate. Put the puppy back inside and shut the crate door. Remember: no talking, petting, or playing of any kind. If the puppy gets rewarded in any way during this potty break, they will associate waking you up with a positive reinforcement leading to a puppy that wakes you up in the middle of the night even after they are old enough to sleep through it.

Another problem is when a puppy goes potty inside of the crate. When this happens, you'll want to look at a few things; first, 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.

Susan Garrett offers a wonderful online [Crate Games](#) course that will leave your puppy loving her crate and rushing to go inside from across the room with just a simple command. I highly recommend this online course for all dog owners.

Creating a routine

It's a good idea to always take your puppy to the same place and make sure to say the same thing each time like, "Go potty." Eventually, the puppy will associate what you say with going potty outside. You'll be able to say, "Let's go potty!" and have your puppy run to the door. Once you take them outside, don't allow them to come back in until they go to the restroom. If they don't go after a while, instead of having free roam of the house when they come back in, I recommend putting them back into the crate until you offer them another chance outside.

If you have a fenced-in backyard and can let your dog outside unsupervised, be sure to watch to make sure they actually are going to the restroom before they come inside. Also, if your puppy has been outside unsupervised for 20 minutes or so, keep in mind they probably went potty when they first went out and might still need to go again soon. Another thing you can do is keep an eye on bowel movements so that you'll know when to give your dog extra time outside. Most dogs will get on a pretty regular routine.

Earning freedom

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 recently gone potty 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 can have the whole house to play in when you are home, still do not assume you can leave them out when you gone. I recommend keeping your dog in the crate until they are 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 old the dog is. Remember, if we've done it properly, the crate should be an area they see as very rewarding. Think about this, 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. If you are ensuring your dog gets lots of physical and mental stimulation throughout the rest of the day, using the crate for extended rest periods is okay.

To 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 and persistence are required to make houstraining successful.