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Housetraining Your New Puppy or Dog

Here are the basics for housetraining your new dog.

1. Have a routine schedule for potty breaks, such as:
 - First thing in the morning
 - 15 to 30 minutes after each meal
 - Immediately after drinking water
 - Right after play, exercise or excitement
 - Early evening
 - Bedtime and one or two times during the night for puppies depending on age

2. Puppies/Dogs must be confined if you have taken them out and they have not gone potty. Confinement can be done with a crate, a tiedown (a four ft. leash attached to a heavy fixed object or wall), a leash attached to you, an exercise pen, or a small room with gate. You can use all of these in combination -- you don't have to choose just one. If they are in an x-pen or small room, have a housebreaking pad (whose smell that attracts dogs), so they can eliminate on the pad if needed. The advantage of a tiedown or crate is that the space is small enough so they will not eliminate and soil their "den." Puppies/Dogs must be supervised on a tiedown, and be crate trained, if using a crate—see my training tip on how to crate train.

3. When taking your dog outside, take them to a designated area that is soft and absorbent. Grass or mulch works well. Take them on a leash, so they stay on task, and give them a verbal cue such as "go potty." Only give him about 10 minutes to go. When he does go, have a treat to give them immediately and use praise. If you like, you can now let them off leash to play in the yard, or take them in the house. If they went poop, if it is shortly after a meal, or has gone pee, you can now allow them to have short supervised play inside the house. I always say they have earned their freedom when they are "running on empty." If they have not eliminated, they go back to a confined area, and try again 10-15 minutes later. If they go, have a party with treats and reward with exercise and freedom.

4. Supervise your new dog at all times inside the house. Close all doors and keep an eye on him so you can catch him in the act. This is also to keep him safe from picking up or chewing something that is dangerous. You don't allow your toddler to have unsupervised reign of the house. You shouldn't allow your puppy to have that either.

Always look for signs that your dog/puppy has to go. Here are the usual signs:

- Sniffing and circling.
- Running away from the area where he was playing or chilling.
- Running to the door.
- Going to an area where he has eliminated before.
- Whining and agitation or distraction.

What do I do if my puppy/dog has an accident?

1. Do not punish him during or after the act. He will only learn it is dangerous to go potty in front of you, making it much harder to get him to go for you outside. He will learn to hide urine and feces from you, and you will start to find the mistakes in closets, behind furniture, or rooms seldom used.
2. If you see him go, gently scoop him up and take him outside to his designated potty area. You can use a gentle word like "oopsy," as a verbal marker that says, "This is not the place," as you take him out. It doesn't matter if he is completely empty, take him to his designated spot anyway. Say your cue, and have him hang out for a few minutes. Be very careful with your small dogs and sensitive puppies/dogs. They may get scared if your voice sounds too loud or threatening, or if you grab and rush them outside too aggressively. If we scare them, we will create a negative about the potty experience which will have to be overcome to achieve a reliably housebroken dog.
3. Clean the accident area with a spot remover of your choice, and then an enzymatic cleaner. The most popular is Nature's Miracle found at most pet stores.

Other Tips:

- Pull water up two hours before bed.
- A rule of thumb about how long puppies can "hold it:"
During waking times: Two months old – two hours; Three months old – three hours; Four months old – four hours, etc. If they are sleeping, you can add an extra hour or two. But not every puppy reads the manual!
- If you have an adult dog who is housebroken, take them out at the same time – they can help show your puppy the ropes.

- Puppies are attracted to places that are absorbent, so will frequently go on carpet, their bedding, and yours! It is helpful to take bedding out of the crate.
- Some trainers believe that if you leave the house immediately after taking your dog potty, they will avoid going, because they make the unpleasant connection between potty time and you leaving. Try to disconnect these -- take them out 15 minutes before you get ready to leave.
- Some trainers believe that if the puppy is brought inside right after eliminating they will delay going. If your puppy likes the outdoors, have a short play session after elimination and before they come in.
- Some behaviorists believe that if your puppy watches you clean up feces, this will lead to them eating it. This is more common in females than males. Err on the side of caution -- don't have your puppies watch you do yard cleanup.
- Make sure the treat reward is immediate. If you wait until you get inside the house, they will associate the reward with coming inside, not the elimination that happened a minute or two beforehand.
- It is natural for there to be some regression, but if your puppy seems to be urinating with a lot more frequency or if housebreaking has totally fallen apart, it is possible your puppy has a urinary tract infection (UTI). UTI's are common in puppies. With a urine sample, vets can tell you right there in the office if that's the case.
- The bladder does not fully develop until puppies are around 5-6 months of age. You can't expect them to be fully housebroken until then. The mistakes will get less frequent, but expect mistakes to happen. For small breed puppies, the bladder takes even longer to develop, and housebreaking can take 9 months or longer.

Consistency and patience are the keys to housebreaking your new dog. The less frustration you experience, the quicker your dog will learn.

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