

Integrative Veterinary Care
Crate and House Training
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The key to housebreaking is *never letting the dog potty in the house*. If the dog never uses the carpet as a toilet, he will never know what a fantastic toilet carpet is. A good airline crate is an essential tool in housebreaking.

Crate Training

The crate is not used as a place of banishment. Being crated must *never* be used as punishment. Going into the crate should *always* be a positive experience, accompanied by praise and a treat. The dog must *never* be dragged or pushed into its kennel. Even an older dog can be taught to willingly enter its new crate. Here's how:

- Start with the crate door open. Call your dog to the crate and offer him a treat. Then put a treat just inside the open door so he must stick his head into the crate to eat the food. Give your "kennel up" command (I use "go kennel"). Do this 6-10 times a day for 2-3 days.
- Begin putting the food farther and farther back in the crate, until the dog has to get completely into the crate to get the food. Still leave the door open. By the time the food is by the back wall of the crate, your dog should be realizing that "kennel up" means "go into the crate to get a yummy treat".
- Feed your dog his meals inside the crate. Use the same technique as with the treats -- place the food at the front of the crate first, and move the bowl back gradually to the back.
- When your dog will get all the way into the crate to get the treat or to eat his meal, start asking him to kennel up prior to offering the treat. Then start asking the dog to wait several seconds after the first treat for a second treat. Gradually increase the interval between the first and second treats until the dog will wait for more than a minute without leaving the crate.
- Once your dog will wait in the crate with the door open, begin closing the door for a few seconds at a time before giving the second treat or while he is eating. Gradually increase the time that the door remains closed until your dog will stay in the crate for up to two hours while you are home. At this point, your dog should be willingly staying in the crate all night long as well.

Puppies are a bit easier. Begin leaving them in the crate all night long the first night they come home. Be prepared for some whining and crying, which you must steel yourself to ignore. The protests should subside over 2-4 nights if they are not rewarded with attention. Puppies should always get a small treat when being put in the crate, but food and water should *never* be left in the crate with the pup!

The crate should be in someone's bedroom at night to allow the dog to feel that it is a part of the family and that it is not being isolated and left to die. The idea is to get the dog to begin to consider the crate to be its den, then to extend the den concept to include the entire house. Eventually, after 6 months or so with no "accidents", you will be able to leave the crate door open at night. Most dogs regard the crate as their own personal bedroom and will even retreat to the crate on their own when they are tired, want to be alone, or are not feeling well.

Housebreaking

Now for the hard part!

- Your dog or puppy must spend all night in the crate.
- First thing in the morning, the dog goes immediately outside. Puppies should be carried to prevent mistakes. Older dogs may need to be rushed out on leash -- attach the leash before your dog exits the crate.
- Dog or puppy gets 2 minutes to eliminate -- usually urine at this hour.
- If he goes potty, he gets to be loose in the house for 5 minutes -- if he's a puppy -- or 10 minutes -- if he's an adult. Then he gets breakfast.
- Immediately after breakfast, he goes outside again, and gets 3-5 minutes to eliminate. If he eliminates, he gets to be loose in the house for 10 minutes. Then he goes back in the crate for 30-40 minutes.
- After 30-40 minutes, take him outside again.

Each time you take the dog out to potty, use a signal word like "go potty" or "hurry up" or something else your family can easily remember. You can use different words for urination and defecation if you want to. If your dog "hurries" appropriately, praise him -- gently. If we are too exuberant we will interrupt the process, the dog will stop pottying and forget to finish and we will have a "full" dog loose in the house! Praise should be "good (potty word), good dog, good (potty word)". When he is finished, you can offer a small treat as a reward for pottying in the right place on command.

If your dog fails to potty when asked, he goes back into the crate (no negative emotion, if he's good about crating you may skip the treat for getting in) for 20 minutes. Then you repeat the process.

Only an empty dog can be let loose in the house, and until your dog can spend 45 minutes loose without an accident he must *never* be left unsupervised, even for 2 minutes. Unsupervised dogs in the house must be crated. If the dog must be left unsupervised, he must be left in a room without carpet (without a toilet). The time that your dog or puppy may be considered "empty" and left loose after pottying may be extended by 5 minutes per week for puppies or 10 minutes for adults. If at any point you have an "accident", decrease the time your dog is allowed to be loose by 5-10 minutes.

As you increase the period of free time, you should also increase the period of crated time that follows free time until your dog is going 2 hours between trips outside. Puppies at 16 weeks should have no difficulty "holding it" in the house for 2 hours. When the time between potty trips is two hours, continue increasing the period of free time by 5-10 minutes per week. Eventually your dog will be able to be loose in the house all the time when you are home, only needing to go out every two hours.

Your dog will learn that pottying outside earns him the freedom to roam about the house.

Strict Supervision

Until your dog has gone for 6 months without an "accident", you will need to watch him constantly while he is loose in the house. You can be a little more relaxed when the dog is on tile or other solid flooring, because solid flooring is not an ideal toilet for urination. If you notice your dog sniffing excessively, circling, moving with a hunched posture, or just staring intently at you or at the door, ask him if he has to go potty and take him outside. If he goes, praise him enthusiastically. If he doesn't, you may crate him or allow him the rest of his "free period" with strict supervision. Most dogs have very subtle signals indicating a need to go out -- some dogs will just stand in front of the door, waiting, and if you don't notice in time, it's your fault!

One technique that I find very useful for supervision during free time is using the leash as an umbilical cord. I attach one end of the leash to my dog and the other end to me, so he has no choice but to stay within 6 feet of me. This way, I know where he is all the time, and if he starts to pull toward the door or circle the change in tension or movement of the leash alerts me. The leash also keeps the dog out of the secretive areas dogs tend to prefer to use as toilets in the house, especially after they've been "caught in the act" a few times. He can't get under the table, behind the couch, into the closet, or to the end of the hall without my noticing.

In Case of an Accident

It happens to everyone. It's no big deal, so don't make a big deal out of it. If you catch your dog in the act, interrupt him with a firm "no", rush him gently outside, and ask him to finish. If he doesn't finish, he goes back into the crate with no further negative comment or action from you. If he does finish, praise lavishly and give him a treat. Remember that if you interrupt your dog too harshly, you will frighten him and he will forget that his bladder or rectum was full, he won't finish outside, and your dog will still be full. Interrupting too harshly also causes the dog to learn that he should avoid eliminating where you can see him at all costs, rather than teaching him not to eliminate in the house.

If you find the mess after the fact, do not attempt to punish your dog. Your dog will learn that you become angry when there is urine or feces on the floor but he will not associate your anger with the act of urinating or defecating in the house. He will learn to act submissive when you come home or when there is a mess on the floor in an attempt to defuse your aggressive behavior. You will think that your dog is "guilty" and "knows what he did wrong", but he is actually not capable of that type of logic and is actually just responding to your aggressive behavior towards him. Pointing your dog's nose at the mess and yelling at him or rubbing his nose in it may teach him to clean up after himself or to fear urine or feces on the floor, but will not help housebreak the dog.

Messes on the floor should be cleaned up quietly and without emotion, preferably out of sight of the dog. Enzymatic cleaners such as Nature's Miracle or Simple Solution will remove odor and residue -- follow the label directions for best effect. Do not attempt to use any product containing ammonia to remove doggie mess. Ammonia is the "active ingredient" that gives urine its characteristic odor, and saturating or wiping the floor with any ammonia will encourage the dog to use that location as a toilet again.

Housebreaking Problems

If your housebroken dog begins having accidents or experiences a change in his potty habits, consult with your veterinarian. Changes in frequency, urgency, or pattern of urination may result from urinary incontinence, infections, or other internal diseases which must be addressed before your dog can begin to "hold it" again. Intact males may decide to mark the inside of the house, or may urinate on objects that smell like other dogs to establish their scent as the dominant scent and claim the object as their territory.

Regarding Puppies

You may choose to buy a crate that will be large enough for your dog as an adult. If you do, you will need to block off half of the crate with a box, piece of plywood, or an exercise pen panel. The puppy only needs to have enough space in the crate to turn around and lie down comfortably. If he has too much space, he may be able to urinate in one corner and "get away from it". He also cannot have any big soft bedding that will wick the urine away from him. We want the urine to be able to get him so he will resist urinating in the crate. After a couple of months, when you feel comfortable that your pup has decided that his crate is not a good toilet, you may give him some soft bedding.

If your puppy will have to spend several hours alone each day, you need to decide whether he will be outdoors or indoors while you are away. If the answer is outdoors, he will need a safe, escape-proof area with shade, water, appropriate chew toys, and above all else, no access to toxic plants. You may wish to set up a dog run or an exercise pen for your pup outside instead of letting him have free access to the yard at first to keep him from learning that plants are fun to destroy, etc.

If your pup will be indoors, he needs to be left in a safe long-term confinement area. He should not be crated all day. Long-term confinement areas are escape-proof and have: solid floors, water dishes, maybe food, chew toys, the pups' crate with the door left open, and a potty box. Yes, a litter box for dogs -- preferably containing potting soil, dirt from your yard, rocks, grass, or whatever substrate you want your dog to potty on outside. You can use kitty litter, but I prefer to use whatever I expect my dog to use outside because dogs develop very strong preferences for surfaces to eliminate on. I find it easier to start with the surface I want him to use long-term rather than having to wean him off of one substrate and onto another.

I also prefer the litter box to using paper or "pee pads". The litter is more absorbent and therefore more attractive to the dog as an elimination substrate. The dog may choose to play in the litter and distribute it on the floor, and may use the litter on the floor to potty, but will be "getting the idea".