



Housebreaking tips for dogs

By Jeff Coltenback

One of the challenges of raising a puppy or training a rescue dog is housebreaking. It's not always easy, but it's usually simple to housebreak a dog of any age. This article will highlight a few ways you can achieve your goal. The following paragraphs are merely some tips that may help. If you need more hands-on help, I suggest you consult a dog trainer or pet professional. First and foremost, we have to understand that dogs don't automatically train themselves. In fact, relieving themselves, biologically (i.e. – peeing and pooping), is rewarding in and of itself. Have you ever gone a long drive and you have to use a restroom real bad? Then, when you finally get to "go" you are relieved. Well, dogs relieving themselves is often just that – very relieving! So, they need to be taught what is appropriate.

The first thing you need to do is to get your dog on a schedule. The schedule should include eating, sleeping, walking, playing, etc. Getting your dog on a strict schedule is huge step in the right direction. Do not free feed (i.e. leave food at for your dog to eat at will). Give your dog a strict feeding schedule. Put the food down at the same time every day. Walk your dog the same times every day. Play with your dogs and then make sure they relieve themselves immediately after play. Put your dog to bed the same time every night (walk your dog right before bed; limit water). As soon as your dog wakes up, take the dog out to relieve it. For young pups, they will need to go as often as every ten minutes if they are active. Dogs will generally need to go out right after they eat as well. Always consider your dog's need to relieve! Don't give your dog an opportunity to soil the house.

Let's review what isn't appropriate. The number one rule of thumb is: If you didn't catch them, it didn't happen. What I mean is that if you didn't catch the dog peeing or pooping, you can't reprimand them for it. You must catch them in the act for a verbal reprimand to be effective. The biggest mistake people make, and it's quite "old school", is to come home to see pee or poop on the floor somewhere. They then go on to either get the dog or call the dog to them and then proceed to bring the dog to the soiled area and put their face in the mess. This does absolutely nothing more than damage your relationship with the pet. You many think your pet will "get it". But, all your teaching your dog is that #1- it's sometimes uncomfortable to be around you; #2 – coming to you isn't always pleasant; #3 – The really smart dogs may have the capacity to learn that you don't like dog crap! But, at the end of the day, you are only causing trust issues if this is what you've been doing. Dogs live and learn HERE AND NOW!! Stay in the moment.

Another challenge to housebreaking is the pup or dog that was previously wee-wee pad trained. How is this a potential problem, you ask? Let's look at it from the dog's perspective. You have taught and rewarded your dog for peeing and pooping where? On the pad? Maybe. More importantly, you need to understand that you taught your dog to go to the bathroom IN YOUR HOUSE!! Now, you have to un-train the dog. Think about that challenge. What if you had to teach your dog to not sit after rewarding sit for months? See where I am going with this? Fret not. It's still quite simple. Just understand what your dog may be thinking when you change the rules all of a sudden. The key factor here is to practice a little extra patience because you are re-training your dog. Re-training is a bit more challenging than training. Make sense?

The rule of thumb, going forward, when house breaking a dog of any age or level of learning, is to practice the supervision approach. Basically, your pooch should not be unsupervised, ever, during house training. You need to treat your pooch like an 8 week old puppy, regardless of its age. Now, when I say supervised, I mean supervised. Being home and cooking dinner while your pup is in the living room is NOT supervised. Taking a shower when your pooch is in the kitchen is NOT supervised. Supervision, as I am describing, means you can SEE YOUR PUP! If you can't see your dog, your dog is UNSUPERVISED. Why is this important? It's important because in order to teach your dog right or wrong

timing is crucial (as mentioned previously). In other words, if your dog poops in the dining room and you didn't see it, it never happened! Yea, yea I know. There's crap on the floor. You say it happened. But, as far as reprimanding your dog for it, it never happened because you didn't "catch them in the act". You need to be able to catch them in the act in order for your verbal reprimand to be effective. If you catch them "doing it" you can reprimand them (verbally, please no physical punishment here), then take them outside where it is appropriate to urinate or defecate and then praise them for going outside! It's pretty simple. Most dogs catch on very quickly. Others take longer, especially if going to the bathroom in the house was ever acceptable (i.e. wee wee pads).

Let's get back to supervision. What if you can't supervise your dog? This is where crate training or confinement comes into play. Crating a dog is a useful tool when housebreaking. If you don't want to use the crate, that's ok. You just need to come up with another confinement method such as baby gates or block them into a small room like the kitchen or bathroom (puppy proof such rooms to avoid your pup getting into trouble with chewing or ingesting harmful substances). Here's the key to confinement. Make sure you confine the dog in the same room it eats and sleeps in. This is very important for house breaking. Dogs are less likely to pee and poop where they eat and sleep. This is a well known fact. So, if you are not currently feeding the dog where it is confined, then start doing so! This will help your cause. Whether you crate or confine your dog, you should make this place a very happy and safe place. Always place your pet in their "area" in a positive way. Throw a treat or toy in there with them. And, of course, feeding them there will create a positive association. Never punish your dog by giving it a "time out" in their confinement area. Dogs don't know what the heck a time out is.

If you can always supervise your pooch, you may ask if you still need to confine them. The answer is yes. You do need to put them away for hours at a time. You may need to start by putting them away for an hour or so and work your way up to a few hours at a time. Doing so will allow them to strengthen their bladder and bowls – especially important for young pups or small breeds that may not have the strength to hold it initially. Not all dogs have the physical capacity to hold it in when first being house trained.

On that note, think about this whole housebreaking thing. We are teaching our dogs to do something very unnatural. It is unnatural to teach dogs to hold it in. Dogs naturally will relieve themselves when they have to – if given the chance. So, it is important to understand we are teaching them to do something that goes completely against a very natural instinct. When animals have to go, they just go. That's how it works with animals. I am just saying this so you better understand your dog's point of view. Too often we are preoccupied with wanting our dogs to understand us. God forbid we try to understand them. If we spent more time trying to understand them, all of our dogs would be better served! Finally, below is a quick list of tips for you to review.

1. Get your dog on a schedule; for everything!
2. Don't free feed. Control their feeding times and amount of food.
3. Dogs live here and now. If you didn't catch them, it didn't happen
4. Supervise, supervise, supervise – keep an eye on your pooch
5. Praise, praise, praise when your dog eliminates outside
6. Always put your dog in a position to succeed
7. Don't feel bad if you have to confine your dog during house breaking
8. Practicing patience and avoiding frustration is best.