

# Houstraining Puppies

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Houstraining puppies is easy, right? How hard could it be? Little puppies learn it all the time, right?

Successful houstraining depends on aligning your handling with the dog's instincts and helping the dog develop the habits you desire. It also depends on holding up your end of the bargain: giving the dog a good schedule of chances to eliminate.

The dog is never going to "understand" houstraining. Elimination means completely different things to humans as to dogs. A puppy who acts upset when you find a houstraining accident is not "feeling guilty" because the puppy "knows it's wrong." The puppy is showing submission to you, and possibly even fear of you. Many small male dogs will never be able to handle the full run of your home without accidents, and that is also true of some tiny females. This is a real shock to those people who have chosen a tiny dog because they didn't want to deal with houstraining!

## Schedule

The first element of houstraining is a good schedule. The schedule means you commit to taking your puppy outside at certain, regular times. The puppy is then able to learn to count on those opportunities to relieve bowels and bladder. Dogs need to be taken out to use the bathroom after eating, napping, playing and any time they wander off while inside, possibly looking for a spot to go.

Some simple guidelines will get you started:

1. Leave a puppy without access to a potty area during the day no longer than the number of hours equaling the pup's age in months plus one. This means an 8-week puppy should not be left without a chance to potty for more than three hours. If you are gone 8 hours to work, a puppy this young should have more than one potty break.
2. Don't leave a dog of any age longer than 8 hours without access to a place to potty. This creates a problem for people with long commutes, but violating the guideline can cause physical problems in the dog as well as serious fears that include separation anxiety. It's easy to see why dog walkers, pet sitters, and doggie day cares have plenty of clients.
3. When you are at home and awake, give your dog a potty opportunity at least once per hour. The fact that your dog can hold it all night or 3 to 8 hours during the day at some point does NOT mean the dog can or should be asked to do so around the clock. On the contrary, the dog's body has to catch up on waste elimination to compensate.

4. Watch your dog or puppy for signs that once per hour is not often enough. Some small dogs and young puppies cannot hold it this long. Many things can cause housetraining problems, and for behavioral as well as medical reasons, need to be remedied promptly.

5. Before you leave the house for work, take the pup out to potty at least twice. Take the dog out promptly when you return, even if you were gone a fairly short time. Also take the dog out before and after every time you are going to take the dog with you on a trip away from home. It's important to establish this pattern so your dog can count on it. That helps the dog learn to relieve before your departure and to trust that you will be home in time and you will take the dog out in time to make it until you get home.

6. As your puppy matures, you may be able to reduce the schedule of outings. Watch for which outings the dog does not use for elimination, and you may be able to drop those. Keep in mind, though, that any change in a dog's physical state can cause the dog to need to eliminate urgently, or more often than normal. Aging dogs often have this change. Do not consider this a "behavior problem." It's a physical need that we have a responsibility to meet.

### **Crate Training**

People mean different things by the term "crate training." Misused, a crate becomes a nasty cramped jail cell. Used properly, crate time can help your puppy learn it's safe to be alone for reasonable periods of time, and that confinement is nothing to fear. It can also keep your puppy from carrying out undesired behaviors and making those habits stronger when you absolutely cannot supervise your puppy.

But when you can supervise your puppy, the puppy needs to be out of the crate and under your watchful eyes. Puppies have dozens of things to learn, and they need to bond to you. They also need mental and physical exercise. A crate should be used as little as possible.

It is entirely feasible to raise a puppy successfully with no crate at all. But it is highly desirable to teach a young puppy to rest calmly in a crate, as insurance for potential later life situations, including the destructive chewing stage that comes with the second set of teeth. Other confinement areas can work for this training, but the veterinary hospital, grooming shop, travel, medical-restricted activity, and emergency evacuation may call for crate confinement. When a crate is necessary, you don't want that to add stress to what may already be a stressful situation.

### **Basics and Tips**

Decide where you want your puppy to eliminate at your home. An outdoor fenced area that does not expose your puppy to other people's dogs is ideal.

Don't let anyone overfeed or feed junk. Unless your veterinarian recommends otherwise, give your puppy scheduled meals rather than leaving food out all the time. This has behavior benefits as well as health benefits. Follow your veterinarian's instructions because different situations call for different feeding.

Never punish your puppy over housetraining. It does not work, and it creates more serious problems than housetraining accidents. These include making the dog defensive about other things, making the dog hide

from you to eliminate, causing the dog to lose trust in you, and even creating an aggressive personality. Punishment doesn't solve the houstraining accidents anyway, so it's just a problem all the way around.

In the right place, say "go potty" phrase, and wait for the puppy to eliminate. Praise softly, and try to reward in a way this puppy would like—as you get to know the puppy, you'll develop more options for rewards. These could include praise, petting, treats, a game, more time to play outside, going back inside immediately, or going for a walk.

If you "catch the dog in the act" of having an accident, the rule about no punishment still holds! Hustle the puppy outside quickly, with no more than a "no—outside" spoken in a normal, calm tone of voice. Once out there, say your "go potty" cue and wait. If the dog does it, that is a huge success, and you want to give great praise and reward. If you weren't fast enough, still be upbeat with the dog outside. Just BEING there needs to make your dog feel your approval.

Dogs do not understand houstraining because to their instincts the urine and feces is not offensive, dirty, insulting, or shocking. If your dog is not too small and your house is not too big, the dog can often develop a sense of the house as the "den" area to keep clean. Otherwise, you'll need to confine the dog to whatever area the dog can manage.

### **Teamwork**

Houstraining the puppy is when you learn to aid your dog instead of losing patience and throwing a tantrum! It's also when your puppy learns to trust you and to look to you for help with physical needs. It's an important part of learning to live together, so give it your best. Your dog will meet you at least halfway—dogs always do.

### **The Pet Exam**

Throughout your pet's life, for a variety of reasons, they will need to be restrained. From the first veterinary exam with vaccinations to cleaning ears, or for a bath and nail trim, it is important to teach your pet early to be relaxed even while being restrained. Performing a puppy exam every day will help you monitor the health of your puppy while teaching them about restraint. While you are holding them, put your fingers in their mouth, examine their teeth, smell and rub their ears, and rub their feet. You can run your hands over their whole body to look for any injuries, growths or skin problems.