
House and Crate Training: Canine

Over ninety percent of dog owners keep their beloved canines indoors, so unless you are not part of that ninety percent, you will most likely be house and crate training, or at least house training, your new pup. One of the most important things to remember when beginning this training is that it takes a lot of persistence and time. Although some people do not agree with the concept of crate training a dog, it often makes house training a lot easier for many reasons that will be discussed later; however, before we begin, we must remember two important rules for house training your new dog:

Rule 1: If you don't catch your puppy doing it – then don't punish him for it.

Rule 2: Praise your puppy for doing things right!

Types of House Training

When house training your puppy, there are two general ways to start this process, the first is paper training, and the other is outdoor training.

Paper Training

Many owners of small dogs begin the house training with what we call, “paper training.” Paper training consists of training your dog to relieve itself on newspaper in a specified area of the home, and slowly relocating the paper closer to the door, and eventually outside, and finally eliminating the paper all together. Although paper training is not recommended by our veterinary staff, it is an option that some small breed owners prefer. If you are interested in this option, then feel free to contact our staff with any questions; however, we do not recommend paper training due to the fact that it often elongates the house training process, and is often difficult to re-correct the early habit of eliminating inside the house when the weather conditions outside are not desirable to your puppy.

Outdoor Training

Outdoor training is by far the most common form of house training for canines, and is, according to most, the easiest form of house training, because there is not a second step of retraining your pet in order to have him eliminate outside without the presence of a paper. To begin outdoor training, simply choose a location in your yard where you would like your puppy to eliminate, and bring him to the same location every time you take him outside to do his business.

Using a Verbal Command

Many people will choose to associate a verbal command with the desired area of elimination, such as, “Go potty,” “Do your business,” or something of that nature. Although it may seem like a petty step at the beginning, it will often save you some freezing-cold moments in the middle of winter when you're waiting for little Fido to go to the bathroom and it will tell him that you mean business, and it isn't time to play and run around the yard. After your puppy has eliminated in the desired location, it is best to reward him with a verbal praise, such as, “Good Boy,” or, “Good Girl.” This helps reinforce that what he is doing is pleasing to you, and that his choice of location was the correct choice.

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Setting a Schedule

Having chosen a spot in your yard for Fido to do his business, and having chosen a verbal command so that he knows you mean business, setting a schedule is the next important step. Puppies, just like our children, thrive with a consistent schedule. It is very important to set time increments about every 15-25 minutes, when you are home, to stop and take your puppy to his spot and give him the command to “go potty.” This helps to eliminate possible accidents, and train your dog to go outside when he has to go to the bathroom. In addition to the 15-25 minute increments throughout the day, it is also beneficial to take Fido outside first thing in the morning, before his meals, after his meals, after vigorous play, after a nap, and just prior to bedtime. This is important because it is reiterating that outside is the place for him to eliminate, and not on the new rug, or behind the dining room table.

Food Rewards and Verbal Praise

One of the most overlooked features of training is the rewards and verbal praise. Don't forget to praise Fido when he eliminates on command, or in the desired location. Some trainers and veterinarians recommend that you use a food reward in addition to the verbal praise as a reward for the appropriate behavior. This helps condition the dog into doing the correct behavior. First give a verbal praise, and immediately give a small food reward, such as a piece of kibble, or a small training treat after the desired action. By giving an instantaneous food reward, the puppy associates his good action with a verbal praise from his owner and a treat for his little tummy. The food rewards must be given immediately after the action so that the puppy does not forget what he had just done to receive that reward. It is recommended that you take a small bag of training treats outside, and keep them in your pocket, to have them readily at hand after appropriate elimination.

Correcting the “Accidents”

Many people believe that a puppy will know that he soiled your new rug, or messed up your new family room carpet, but the truth is, he most likely doesn't remember at all. Most puppies, no matter what breed they are, or how smart they are, often don't remember certain activities unless they consider them fun, and going to the bathroom is definitely not considered “fun.”

If your puppy does happen to have an accident, and you do catch him in the act, do not overreact and yell at him. He does not understand that by his eliminating, he was doing anything wrong. It was your fault that you did not pay close enough attention to him to bring him outside before he went to the bathroom, because going to the bathroom is just part of his natural instincts. When Fido starts to eliminate inside, calmly pick up your puppy, scoop his tail under his rear end to help stop his elimination, and relocate him to the correct location to eliminate, and give him his verbal command. After eliminating in the correct location, remember to give him praise.

Spontaneous Urination

Many puppies often urinate when they are excited, or when they are extremely nervous, such as when meeting a new person. In this situation, it is best to not scold your puppy for this urination, but rather clean up the accident and ignore the issue, because it is not within his control. Most puppies will outgrow this problem within four to nine months of age. If the issue

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persists, it may be due to a medical issue, and should be brought to the attention of your veterinarian.

It is also important to tell all guests that come to visit to initially ignore the puppy for the first five minutes to help prevent spontaneous urination. After the initial five minutes have passed, instruct your guests to talk to Fido in a calm manner as to not excite him.

House Training with a Crate

As stated prior, some people do not believe in crate training, but it is often beneficial to house training because it helps to teach your puppy that he can hold his bathroom urges until he is outside. Most dogs will associate their crate as their, “room,” and in turn, will refrain from soiling it due to the fact that it is their bed, and no one wants to sleep in a soiled bed.

Although many people will assume that the larger the crate, the better, that is not always the case. If your dog's crate is too large, he will often eliminate in one corner of the cage, and make his bed in the other corner. When picking out a crate for your puppy, it is best to pick a crate that he can comfortably stand up, and turn around in, or choose a crate that has an adjustable insert that will allow you to shrink, or enlarge, the crate as needed for your puppy's growth.

Benefits of Crate Training

In addition to helping make house training a faster and easier process, crate training also has other benefits. By crate training your dog, you are creating an area that he can call his own, and in which you can place him in the case of travel, boarding, disaster, or for matters of his, or others' safety.

If your dog is going to be boarded or travel any time during his life, he will most likely be spending some time in a crate. By introducing this to him at an early stage of his life, it will make it less stressful when the time comes to be crated.

Crate training is all very effective in time of holidays when you may have relatives coming to visit and they have small children, and you need to move Fido away from them. By having him crate trained, it will make keeping Fido away from certain people a much easier experience. Although you may never board your dog, or take him traveling, or have family members that have small child from which you need to keep Fido away, crate training is very beneficial for the terrible chewing stage.

Acclimation to the Crate

In order to get your puppy comfortable with a crate, it is best to place the crate in a room where he can see the family, such as the family room, your bedroom, or another room that you are frequently in. By doing so, this allows the puppy to see you at all times and help break his natural instincts of thinking that if he is alone, he will not survive.

Puppies will often have fits or cry when first placed in a crate, but you should not stop and console them or give them attention, because this is exactly what they are trying to do by crying. It is best to ignore the crying and only go back to the puppy after he has settled down.

It is best to randomly place the puppy inside the crate, and latch the door, when you are home, for varied intervals. When acclimating your puppy, start with shorter intervals of five minutes, and slowly increase the time. The puppy, especially when really young, will not be able to refrain from elimination for such a long period of time. This will help the dog associate the

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crate as a place to settle down, and not as a punishment. A crate should be like a child's bedroom, and not a prison, or a punishment.

Summary

All in all, house and crate training are mandatory practices for most dog owners. When house training a dog, it is best to remember to not scold your animal for an accident you did not see, and it is very beneficial to praise your pet after doing the desired action. Remember to choose the same location and bring your puppy there every 15-25 minutes and give a verbal command so that your puppy can associate that area with elimination. Upon appropriate elimination, praise your pet. If you catch your puppy in the act of eliminating in an undesired location, calmly relocate him to a desired location, and clean up the mess. If your puppy has spontaneous urination, it is best to clean it up and ignore it. If the problem persists with spontaneous urination, consult a veterinarian. Moreover, it is often beneficial to crate train your dog to help prevent future stress if he may need to be boarded for any reason. It is also beneficial to begin crate training at an early age because it helps your dog learn to hold his urge to eliminate until he is in the appropriate location. Slowly acclimate your puppy to his crate by leaving him in his crate for varied intervals throughout the day when you are home. This will help him associate his crate as a calm place rather than a punishment. If you have any other questions regarding house or crate training, please ask one of our veterinary staff members.