

Toilet training

Instincts



At birth a newborn puppy is unable to eliminate its own waste - Mum licks the puppies to stimulate elimination and in doing so, cleans up as she goes (the equivalent of nappies on our babies). Around three weeks of age the puppies begin to soil for themselves - Mum continues to maintain cleanliness in the nesting area.

It is instinctive for dogs to avoid soiling their social, sleeping or eating areas.

As the puppies become more physically capable, they will attempt to move away from the nesting area to toilet. This can be further assisted by providing the litter with a different floor surface outside their bedding. The puppies will instinctively seek an absorbent area to toilet, such as grass/soil or carpet. As the puppies continue to mature, they will attempt to move further away from their own living area. However, like our own toddlers, the puppies will have accidents - Mum will continue to keep the nest clean and will not scold or reprimand a puppy for any mistakes.

The ease or otherwise of toilet training individual puppies can often be traced back to the breeder's practices. If access to a different surface for soiling was provided to the litter at an early age and the puppies and their living areas were kept clean; your job will be much easier.

If we allow the puppy to practice soiling on wrong surfaces in wrong areas, it may become the puppy's preference for soiling.

Introducing the Puppy to a New Home



The following program for hurrying toilet training along is suitable for all physically sound puppies from eight weeks of age.

The puppy cannot possibly understand that your entire house is its family's living area, to be kept clean - so do not give him full access to your home to allow soiling in inappropriate locations. The more the puppy toilets in the wrong place, the more difficult toilet training becomes. Many toilet training problems are simply the result of poor or non-existent toilet training programmes.

Restrict the puppy's access by a combination of any of the following means:

- Crate training;
- Condition the puppy to be on lead, secured to the leg of a table; or
- give your puppy your **full and undivided attention**.

You will need to take the puppy outside, on lead, to the grassy area where you would like him to toilet, every 30 minutes to begin with.

Getting the puppy active may assist in getting things moving.



If he obliges, reward on completion with enthusiastic praise, favourite food treats reserved for this occasion and/or a game.

Our aim is to minimise the number of mistakes and to reward soiling in the appropriate location.

The container of treats kept at the soiling location can assist in reminding the puppy that an opportunity for a reward is now available.

If the instructions above are followed precisely, the puppy will not have the opportunity to make mistakes and we will be constantly rewarding the correct behaviour. Wouldn't that be wonderful?

Scolding Mistakes

Reprimanding the puppy for soiling in the wrong location - even if you catch him in the act - can be detrimental to toilet training efforts.

Instead of teaching the puppy *not* to toilet in the house, you may simply be teaching him not to toilet in your presence - then when you go to the grassy toilet spot, puppy will not want to toilet while you are watching for fear of reprimand.

Furthermore, when you return indoors, the puppy will take the first opportunity to find an appropriate spot (your bedroom or the living room - anywhere away from his own sleeping and eating areas) to eliminate, when you're not watching!

Using a reprimand should only be introduced after having conducted a minimum of two weeks consistent toilet training as outlined above. Even then, it probably isn't necessary.

Watch for the obvious times that your puppy will need to toilet, such as after a meal or a big drink; upon waking up; after a play session; and any other time in between! Ensure that the puppy is guided to the correct toilet location at these times.

If, while watching your puppy in your house, you observe the pre-toileting behaviours such as sniffing, circling, etc (it will vary from one puppy to the next), rush the puppy to the correct toilet location, keeping him close to floor level so that he can see how to get there himself.

Clean up the Accidents

Thoroughly clean the areas where the puppy has had accidents. The scent of previous puddles and piles will stimulate a puppy to stop and toilet then and there. Use this fact to your advantage by collecting up any droppings and placing them in the grassy area where you would like the puppy to toilet - he will believe that this area is his chosen toilet.

The puppy is not suffering from "guilt" when you walk into the room where he has had an accident – he has simply learned that the presence of a puddle or pile and you in the same room is bad news!

Ensure that your puppy is kept clean of faeces. Long coated breeds, in particular, can get themselves in a mess. If a puppy is permanently soiled, he has no reason to keep his living area clean.

Feeding your puppy indoors and locating water bowls indoors will hasten the understanding that these areas are not suitable for soiling.

Who's to Blame? Guilty Puppy?

Take the blame for any mistakes yourself: you were not paying sufficient attention. Remember, your puppy's Mum cleaned up without scolding - attempting to reprimand the puppy for a bodily function will only create anxiety.

Most puppies will be showing a vast improvement by 12 weeks of age, though still having occasional accidents if not sufficiently supervised. There will be a wide range of ease or difficulty from one pup to the next. Try to remain calm and tolerant - your stress will be obvious to your puppy and may undermine his confidence and trust in you as a consistent, reliable-natured carer, capable of taking care of his needs and providing protection.

Overnight Arrangements

When your puppy first arrives at his new home, I recommend allowing him to sleep in a crate beside your bed during the night. He has just left his mother and litter and will probably be feeling somewhat distraught. When he finds himself alone he will cry for his mother to find him; you can drop your hand to the crate to reassure him that he is not entirely alone.

Your puppy is not likely to be able to "hold-on" overnight until around 16 weeks of age, although this varies greatly. You will have to get up to take the puppy out at least once during the night. It is unfair to force the puppy to toilet in his crate; it will be overriding his clean instincts and will make toilet training far more difficult.

Alternatively, or a couple of weeks on, you might prefer to have the puppy sleep in the laundry. You could place puppy "pee pads" or newspaper at the far end of the room for soiling, ensuring that his bed, water bowl and toys are located closest to the door that leads back to you.

If the puppy knows that he will be sleeping in the laundry each night, he will not want to toilet there during the day when he has other options; you will need to make other arrangements away from the laundry.

Indoor Dog Loo



Indoor dog loos are becoming popular particularly for apartment dwelling dogs. To introduce the dog loo, collect up the dog's previous droppings or urine and place them on the new dog loo. This will suggest to the dog that it is his previous toilet of choice. Ensure the dog loo is located away from areas where the dog's food and water bowls are located and away from his sleeping quarters and living areas. If the dog sleeps in the laundry overnight, then the laundry is not a good location for the dog loo as the dog will not want to toilet in the laundry during the day, knowing that he will be sleeping there again that night.

Rain, Rain, Go Away!

Toilet training efforts in puppies will often take a nose-dive during wet weather. The puppy finds it unpleasant to get his toes wet in order to go to the toilet outside; much more pleasant inside on the rug! Even some mature dogs will object to toileting in the wet and may regress in their toilet training.

To overcome this problem, take the puppy or dog outside on lead and get him wet! Go for a walk or play an active game to get things moving. Only return to the warm and dry indoor comforts after the dog has toileted.

Too Scary to Go Out on My Own!

Puppies will often reach a point where they would like to be outside to relieve themselves, but unless you take them, they won't go out on their own. The cause is commonly, a lack of independence development.

To improve independence levels, consider crate training, the restraint or tie-up exercise, increased socialisation efforts, exclusion of the puppy from family members for regular, short periods of time (backyard with door closed, laundry, etc).

Predicting Toilet Requirements

Keeping a record of the timing relationship between when the puppy eats, drinks and toilets can be of assistance in planning when to get the puppy to his toilet location.

Toilet Training for Mature Dogs



You can implement the above procedures for older dogs experiencing toilet training difficulties.

However, the problem may be occurring for a range of possible reasons and specific assessment and an individual programme may be required.

Your first port of call is your veterinarian. Before a behavioural or management programme is planned, we need to check that there is not a physical ailment causing your dog's toilet training problems, particularly if the problem has suddenly presented.

Toilet training problems in adult dogs are most commonly caused by an underlying anxiety or simply an incomplete toilet training programme from puppyhood.

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