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HOUSETRAINING

Wouldn't it be nice if dogs were born housetrained? Or if babies were born potty-trained? Until such dreams come true, here are some real-life tips:

- Watch for signs of discomfort, restlessness or circling, then whisk him outside to an established, close-by potty place. Realize that when a dog relieves himself in the wrong place, it's not out of spite. It's because he had to go. A problem with not catching the dog in time to whisk him outdoors: the acting of relieving himself in that spot is immediately self-reinforcing due to the rush of relief he feels.
- Praise when she goes potty. Give her a treat or kibble to reinforce the behavior. If 15 or so minutes pass without pottying, trainer Melissa Berryman suggests you pick up a small dog, or bring a larger dog inside for about five minutes and then bring her back out.
- Confine when you can't watch...in a crate or a part of the kitchen. Don't leave food out. Do leave water, unless she'll be confined less than 2 hours. Make this her domain until house-trained.
- Realize that puppies and dogs can't "hold it" for long periods. Even adult dogs may need a mid-day dog walker if you work long hours. And puppies need to urinate and defecate frequently, so they'll need to go out at least every 4 hours to get housetrained.
- Crate-train. The quickest way to housetrain most dogs, crate training is based on the premise they don't like to mess in their sleeping area. Use a crate large enough for your dog to lie down and turn around. For oversized crates, use a divider to confine the dog to one part of the crate until housebroken.
- Feed on a schedule. Feed your dog the same times each day, then take him out a certain amount of time after feeding (this depends on age; often, young puppies must be taken within 15 minutes). Young puppies are usually fed three times a day; older puppies and adult dogs twice a day. Don't switch from food to food; keep the diet consistent.
- Keep a potty routine. Take your dog outside first thing in the morning, when you get home from work, within an hour after the dog eats, just before bedtime, and following vigorous play. Young puppies may need to be taken outside every two hours. They will get housebroken much faster and reliably if someone can take them out midday during the workday.
- Don't end the walk outside when your dog potties. Or she'll get the idea that outdoor fun ends when she relieves herself. This is why some dogs hold it until they are brought back inside. After your dog "goes," praise, give a treat and keep walking a bit longer.
- Eliminate opportunities for accidents. During the first two weeks, keep your dog close to you so that if she starts to potty indoors, you can correct immediately. Otherwise, she may relieve herself in other rooms - and if you don't catch her in the act, there's no use in scolding because the dog won't remember or make the connection. Close off unused rooms, and use a leash to keep her beside you, either holding the leash or attaching it to a furniture leg (for safety's sake, remove the leash when you can't watch her). Until housebroken, crate her when you're not home to watch.

- Interrupt vs. scold. And use your voice, not physical force. Typically, a dog goes because she just has to. If you catch her in the act, try to interrupt the action with a loud, startling AH-AH-AH!! or NO! and an immediate trip to the potty spot. Use a loud, deep, firm vowel sound; muttering or repeating commands won't convey the message. You want to alert, not punish, your dog. When she resumes relieving herself outside, praise lavishly.
- Punishment teaches only fear. Never shove a dog's nose in his mess or smack a dog, which teaches him only to fear hands. Remember: dogs forget what they do after they do it. A dog is unable to associate past behavior with a punishment he is now receiving. He can associate the pain and anger with the person administering the punishment.
- Clean up. Try not to let her see you clean up a mess, or she may think it's an interactive game. Use an enzyme-based pet odor neutralizer like Nature's Miracle or Simple Solution to kill the urine scent. Using ammonia is counter-productive, since urine contains ammonia. Cleaning up extends to the outside, too. Many dogs dislike going in a poop-riddled yard. Note: paper training postpones learning the desired behavior.
- Neuter and spay. Intact dogs have a much greater tendency to mark. Alter by age 6 months.

If problems persist, ask yourself:

- Are you missing signals that your dog has to go out?
- Do you keep your dog on a schedule she can count on?
- Do you use an odor neutralizer on the spots, so your dog won't be tempted to mark there again?
- Could your dog have a medical condition? See your vet right away. A urinalysis and fecal exam will help determine if the dog has an infection, parasites, or a pH imbalance requiring a special food.
- Does your dog urinate when excited or frightened? This is submissive urination. Punishing the dog will only aggravate the problem. When arriving home, greet her quietly and take her right out to potty.
- Is the dog eliminating in her crate? Pet store pups and other dogs who have spent much of their youth in a pen or cage become used to sitting in their mess. Take the dog outside 20 minutes after eating or drinking. Give her a chance to potty before crating.
- If you keep the buckle collar on when crating, make sure it's snug so to reduce the risk of it getting caught on crate wires, and be sure to use a crate pan or pad. Or remove the collar when crating, but be sure to put it back on properly as soon as you release the dog from the crate. Never leave chain, slip or pinch collars on a dog when not training or walking the dog as they can easily get caught on things, leading to injury. Don't attach tags to training collars either; attach tags only to the flat buckle collar.