

Day-One Dog Training

7 Tips for Painless “Potty” Training

By Howard Weinstein

When clients with new pups call me, I don't need to be psychic to foretell that housebreaking (or “potty” training) usually leads the list of issues for which they would really, really, *really* like immediate help. Housebreaking is one of the least enjoyable, most trying challenges of early puppy training. These tips should help you succeed as smoothly as possible:

1) **When puppies do something wrong, there's a human co-conspirator.** Dogs don't make mistakes in a vacuum. They make mistakes either because we *didn't* do something we *should* have done – or *did* something we *shouldn't* have done. Instead of yelling at a puppy who pees on the floor, try to figure out what you can do differently (and better) to keep it from happening again. Mistakes are part of the learning process, so don't waste 'em by assuming it's all the dog's fault. *It isn't!*

2) **Supervision is key.** A young puppy who's out of his crate should *never* be out of your sight. Supervision makes it more likely you'll pick up on your pup's “gotta-go” signals – which may not be Lassie-style scratching and barking at the door. Signals can be as subtle as a meaningful glance from you to

the door. If you're not watching, you won't see it. On the other hand, if you do pick up on your pup's signals and respond by taking him out and then praising him when he successfully pees outdoors, you'll be teaching him to use that signal again and again. Supervision also gives you a better chance to catch your dog “in the act” and get him outside before the deed is done. Unsupervised puppies also get into all kinds of other trouble that's either hazardous to your stuff or to your dog, including chewing on everything from shoes to electrical cords.

3) **Confinement works wonders.** Using a properly-sized crate/kennel makes accidents less likely. Think of a crate as a combination crib and playpen. Use it the same way parents use cribs and playpens for babies and toddlers. When you can't supervise your puppy, let him go potty outside and then put him in his crate where you know he'll be safe and out of trouble.

4) **Feed on a schedule.** Leaving a full food-dish down at all times allows dogs to nibble whenever they please. Food going in one end at odd times will exit the other end equally unpredictably. Puppies who eat at specific mealtimes (leave food

down *only* for 15 minutes or so) will develop digestive routines as predictable as clockwork. Picking up the water bowl two hours before bedtime helps, too.

5) **When in doubt, take 'em out.** Books provide basic schedules as a starting point. But a puppy who gallops for an hour and drinks a gallon of water will need to pee much more quickly than a puppy who's resting in his crate. So adjust the potty-walk schedule to your pup's activities. I'd rather take a puppy out 10 extra times a day and find out he *didn't* need to go than *not* take him out the one time he *did* need to go.

6) **A puppy is like a ticking time-bomb.** It's a matter of *when* he'll go, not *if*. “De-fuse” the time-bomb by taking him out to go before you give him playtime in your family room.

7) **Clean-up.** Accidents are inevitable. Clean up with any of several enzyme-solution cleaning products sold in pet-supply stores. Follow the container-label instructions carefully, and these products will preserve your carpets – and your sanity!

For more complete house-breaking guidelines, refer to any good puppy training book (including my own ***Puppy Kisses are Good for the Soul***).

Howard Weinstein is the author of ***Puppy Kisses are Good for the Soul & Other Important Lessons You & Your Dog Can Teach Each Other*** (available from Amazon.com, or direct from Day-One Dog Training).

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