

Training Your Dog:

Basic House Training

Most puppies can be fairly reliably house trained by the time they get to about 6 months old, although the occasional accident may happen for a while longer. The emphasis should be on rewarding correct behaviour and ignoring mistakes.

Newspaper Training

This is a popular method of house training for young puppies. It has the advantage that most little puppies have been reared on newspaper and it has already become a familiar medium on which they have learned to eliminate. By gradually reducing the area covered by paper, then moving it just outside the door and, by degrees, to the place in the garden that you intend that the dog should use before reducing the size of the paper and then removing it altogether, is usually a very effective method. However, a disadvantage of using this method is that the puppy, although learning to use the paper, is also learning that it is acceptable to go inside the house. In some cases this proves a stronger association than the act of using the newspaper.

As with all training, reward is far more effective than punishment, and puppies consistently rewarded for eliminating where you want them to will quickly learn. Punishment after the event is useless, as dogs have very short memories, and will only associate punishment with what they are in the act of doing when it occurs. Mild punishment **when the pup is caught in the act** has its place - a cross "No!" as you pick up the puppy followed immediately by gentle encouragement and praise when you put him in the right place is all that is needed. However, it is very easy to fall into the trap of relying more on punishment than reward. If, as stated above, you punish after the event, the puppy will never get the message and will become anxious and upset, unable to understand why you are angry. Taken to extreme, even properly timed punishment can have the wrong effect if over done - the puppy that is shouted at, shaken or has its nose rubbed in the mess may simply learn not to do it in your presence and will creep off into other parts of the house to eliminate where you can't see him, even when you have just taken him outside, leaving you with a major problem in that you are now unable to praise the correct behaviour because the puppy won't perform at all when you are present.

House Training for Older Puppies

- **Start the training program at a weekend**, or some other period when you are able to devote plenty of time to it. Take the puppy out first thing in the morning, last thing at night, and **every hour** in between. Wait until he performs, then reward him immediately with praise and a titbit, followed by a good game, or take him for his walk. In this way, you are using something he wants to do as a powerful positive reinforcement for performing when and where you want him to. If he doesn't perform, take him back inside and try again an hour later. Ignoring mistakes

and praising and rewarding him when he goes in the right place will make clear what you want.

- **Supervise the dog all the time** so he is unable to make a mistake - if he has no opportunity to get it wrong and plenty of opportunity to get it right, he should learn very quickly. Be aware of the tell tale signs - take him out as soon as he becomes restless, sniffs the floor or hovers around the door. Praise and encourage any effort he makes to approach the door or indicate that he needs to go out.
- **Go out with the dog every time** so that you are there to praise and reward him - it is no good watching from the house and rewarding when he comes back in, as you will only be rewarding him for coming in, not for eliminating in the correct place.
- Above all else, **be patient** - ignore mistakes, no matter how frustrated you may feel, and always reward the correct behaviour.
- **Add a command** that the dog learns to associate with the act by repeating the word while he is in the act, then praising and rewarding. In this way it is possible to teach the dog to go when told to, increasing your ability to get him to go where you want him to.
- Always ensure that the dog has emptied **both bladder and bowel** before settling down for the night, even if it means staying outside with him for some time - teaching him to go on command will make this easier.

Indoor kennels

Consider the use of an indoor kennel, especially when you are unable to supervise him. This should be just big enough to contain the dog's bed and a water bowl and works on the principle that a healthy dog will not foul his bed and will therefore wait until let out to urinate or defecate. If you are using an indoor kennel and he doesn't do anything the first time you take him out in the morning, he should be put back into it until you try again and only allowed loose in the house after he has performed. If the problem only happens at night, it may be that although the young dog is now capable of waiting until morning, he hasn't actually learned to do so. Confining him to his bed at night, by use of an indoor kennel, will help to overcome this problem.

The above training program should ensure success and is suitable for dogs of all ages, including rescue dogs and dogs which may have spent some time in kennels. As with all training, there are many ways of dealing with any problem. If you need further help, please contact the surgery.

This information has been compiled by Sarah Coton, Head Veterinary Nurse and Canine Behaviour Consultant at our Warwick centre. Further advice is available by appointment.

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