

How to housebreak your new puppy

Follow these guidelines to make housebreaking as easy as possible for you and your pet.

Start at the ideal age. The best time to begin housebreaking a puppy is when it is 7 1/2 to 8 1/2 weeks old. At this age, you can teach the puppy where to eliminate before it has established its own preferences. But don't worry if your puppy is older when you start housebreaking; it will still learn, though it may take a little longer.

Six to eight times a day, take your puppy outdoors to eliminate. Choose an appropriate spot to take the puppy immediately after it wakes up, after play sessions, and 15 to 30 minutes after meals. If you take your puppy to the same spot every day, previous odors will stimulate it to urinate or defecate. Many puppies need 15 to 20 minutes of moving around and sniffing before they eliminate. Stay with the puppy the whole time. Housebreaking problems can result if you're unsure whether the puppy actually eliminated and you let it return to the house too soon. And remember the puppy needs to focus on the job at hand, so don't play with it until it has eliminated.

Use a key phrase while your puppy eliminates. If you repeat the same phrase (e.g. "go potty" or "take care of business") every time your puppy eliminates outdoors, it will learn that this phrase means that it's the right time and place to eliminate.

Once the puppy eliminates outdoors, immediately reward it. Reward the puppy by praising it, giving it a treat, or playing with it. But remember to reward it right away. The puppy will not learn to eliminate outdoors if the reward comes when it returns to the house. Instead, the puppy will think that it's being rewarded for coming inside.

Supervise the puppy indoors as well as outdoors. Find a room in your house that allows you to watch your puppy as much as possible. This will help you catch the puppy if it

starts to eliminate indoors. You can also leash the puppy or place a bell on its collar to help you keep track of it.

When you leave home, put the puppy in a crate. When you can't supervise your puppy, leave it in a small puppy-proof area such as a crate. If the crate is large enough to accommodate the puppy as an adult, partition it to avoid having the puppy soil one end and sleep in the other. And remember that young puppies' bladder and bowel capacities are limited, so let the puppy out at least every four hours.

Don't punish after the fact. If your puppy has an accident in the house, don't go get the puppy and rub its nose in it. This doesn't do any good because the misbehavior has already occurred. Instead, try to catch the puppy in the act. If you see the puppy getting ready to housesoil, don't swat it, but stomp your foot, shake a can filled with pennies, or startle the puppy by yelling "outside!" The puppy will likely stop what it's doing, and you can take it outdoors to eliminate.

Don't leave food out all day. Feed your puppy at set times every day, and remove the food bowl after 20 minutes. This will create regular intervals at which the puppy will need to eliminate.

Thoroughly clean areas where the puppy has eliminated in the house. Your veterinarian can recommend a safe, effective product that removes both odors and stains. It's important to clean a soiled area completely, otherwise your puppy may return to it and housesoil again.

Stick with the training program. Most puppies can be successfully housebroken by 14 to 20 weeks of age. But a pet may take longer to housebreak for several reasons. Consult your veterinarian if you're having difficulty.



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PLAY BEHAVIOR IN DOGS

Play Behavior in Puppies

Puppies begin to play as soon as they can walk. Littermates commonly wrestle and chase each other, pulling on ears or tails. Through play with littermates, pups learn just how strong they are or how to turn circumstances to their advantage.

By the time it is weaned, each pup has formed an impression of its own abilities and social standing within the ranks of littermates. This forms the basis for adult behavior, such as achievement of dominance, in relation to people and other dogs.

Play allows a young animal to practice important life skills without adult consequences. Running, jumping, hiding, and other playful antics could be invaluable later when hunting for food or escaping an enemy. Play is one of the best ways to teach desirable behavior to a pet by setting standards for a lifetime. By tolerating subtle or not so subtle dominance behavior even in young puppies, for example, you may encourage inappropriate social patterns.

Undesirable Forms of Play

Wild and uncontrolled forms of play frequently lead to undesirable behavior in juvenile and adult dogs. Games that encourage chasing and jumping on people promote aggressiveness. Don't encourage your dog to mouth, chew, nip, or nibble any article of clothing or part of a person's body, even if it is behaving playfully. Avoid games that arouse your dog's aggressive instincts, such as wrestling or tug of war with any object.

Forms of play that do not focus a dog's attention on you or reinforce your authority may lead to misdirection of the animal's energies.

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The results of a dog's unrestricted activity are often undesirable. Also, you lose the opportunity to teach your dog desirable skills.

Obedience Training During Appropriate Play

Ideally, a pet should behave in a calm and controlled manner. The ideal dog should obey you and behave gently toward people under normal circumstances.

Play should incorporate obedience training to provide an opportunity for constructive interaction with a practical purpose. As compared with wild play, controlled play is often more enjoyable for both you and your dog and tends to inspire more frequent play sessions.

Use food treats if you believe this will keep your pet's attention and give additional incentive to obey. Food treats should not become habitual, however, or they can actually work against you. Your dog might not pay attention without them or could become finicky and work for only particular treats from one session to the next.

Your dog will enjoy obeying your command to "sit" if this will earn it the right to chase after a ball.

Call your dog to "come" as it retrieves the ball and to "sit" again when it returns. Say "drop it" as it gives the ball to you. This is a chance to practice obedience skills and provides the dog additional opportunities to earn your praise.

Agility training teaches dogs to go up inclines and over jumps. You can build your own obstacle course in your backyard and use it to apply obedience skills for great fun with your dog. Many dog clubs offer agility training at their facilities. This has the added benefit of exposing your dog to others for additional socialization.