

Housebreaking Rules

Housebreaking can be a frustrating time. Try to remember that it will not last forever, and as with many other elements of puppy-hood, the time you put in now will pay off exponentially later. A general rule of thumb is that your puppy is housebroken after they have gone for one month with no accidents. However, remember that just because your puppy is housebroken in one area (such as your house) does not necessarily mean that he/she will be housebroken in a different area (such as a friend's house). Dogs in general do not generalize very well, and it will take time to teach them that there are many places they should not eliminate in and only a few places where they can eliminate. The "rules" below are designed to aid you in your housebreaking quest and help you to make it as short and painless as possible.

Make a Bathroom

Even from a young age, puppies do not want to eliminate near where they eat, drink, sleep, and play. They like to keep themselves clean of waste, if possible. To aid your puppy in learning where you would like them to eliminate, designate an area of your yard the "potty spot" and take your puppy there (on leash) frequently for potty breaks. The potty spot should be about 6 feet in radius (about as long as your leash) and free of toys and distractions. While there, do not engage your puppy in play or social interaction. Instead, try to make the spot as boring as possible. Give your puppy a cue ("Go Potty", "Hurry Up", "Do Your Business", etc) so that eventually you can cue them to potty on command (useful for when you are in a strange place such as on vacation and your puppy is uncertain where is an appropriate place to eliminate). As they begin to potty, praise them *softly and gently*, and then when they finish, throw them a huge party right there in the yard. Then hurry back inside and let the games continue.

Unintentionally, many puppies go out for potty breaks and get distracted by all the new sights and smells and sounds. They forget they had to go. Then, when they come back inside, they remember, and have an accident. Therefore, try to make the outside boring while you are potty training your puppy, and save the games for inside. Have your puppy spend the majority of their time inside, with outside being reserved only for potty time and short walks.

Scheduled Feedings

If you know when it goes in, you can predict when it will come out- usually about 30 to 60 minutes after they eat, and about 30 minutes after a big drink of water. This is why it is so important not to free-feed your puppy! Free feeding is when you leave the food out all day for your puppy to pick at whenever they want. Instead, feed your puppy on a schedule, two or three times a day. Set the food down for half an hour at most, then pick it up. This way you can predict when your puppy will need to eliminate, plus you have the added advantage of better control over your pup's weight, the ability to ask for desired behaviors before meals (giving the meal as a reward), and a more accurate read on your pup's health (do they usually clean their bowl, but they've been leaving some kibble in the bowl the last few meals? Could be an upset stomach, or other things- but this way you can watch it, and ask your vet).

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Constant Supervision

In the first little while of living in a new place, your puppy should be on a leash (either dragging it behind him or leashed to you) at all times, or in a kennel when you are unable to watch him. Having a puppy on a leash helps you better pay attention to him, and you will be better able to tell when he needs to go, as well as stop him from other unwanted behavior such as unwanted chewing.

A kennel is a safe place for your puppy while you cannot watch him and should be just big enough for him to stand up, turn around, and lay back down. This way, he will want to hold his pee and poop for as long as possible, because he will not want to have to lay in it. This said, a puppy should only be in a kennel at any length of time for his age in months plus one, to a maximum of 8 hours or so. So, a two month old puppy can not be expected to hold his bladder for more than 3 hours, and a five month old puppy for about 6 hours. Do not let your puppy out while he is whining- wait for a breath of silence to let him out. When you do let him out, take him right outside on leash to the potty spot in the yard.

Clean Up Appropriately

Dogs have an amazing sense of smell. Where they smell pee and poop is where they think they should go (this is why you have established a potty spot in your yard). Most people clean up messes in the house well enough so that humans can't see or smell it, but if your puppy can smell it, it's not good enough! Do your normal cleaning routine, and then follow up with an enzymatic cleaner like Nature's Miracle or Get Serious!. Also, never use a cleaner with ammonia, as ammonia is in urine, and so you are likely to accidentally tell your puppy to pee where you cleaned with ammonia.

Catch Them In the Act

At some point, your puppy will make a mistake, and this is a learning experience. Everything above is to set them up for success, but often to complete housebreaking, owners need to catch their puppy in the act at least once. When you do, catch them immediately (just as they begin squatting, if possible, but certainly before they finish) and interrupt them in some way. This could be anything from quickly moving toward them to using a loud, startling and stern NO!. You don't want to scare them, but you do want to startle him (so hopefully he will stop mid-accident). Immediately scoop them up and head right out to the potty spot in the yard (even if they haven't stopped!). There, encourage them to eliminate using your cue and be sure to be relaxed so as to reassure them that eliminating is not the problem- the problem is *where* to eliminate. Once they do, throw them a party with tons of praise!

Remember: If you do not catch them in the act and instead find a surprise later, you CAN NOT do anything about it! Simply clean it up and resolve to be more vigilant next time.



If you need help, please don't hesitate to contact Mel!

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Crate Training

Crates take advantage of the den instinct of dogs—dogs in general like to have a place they can call their own, where they can relax and get away from it all. They like to keep their den area clean, so they have a natural instinct to not mess in their crate (den) if they can help it. The key to crates is to make sure the crate is small enough so that there's just enough room for your puppy to stand up, turn around, and lay back down. Any larger and they will try to eliminate in the front and lay down in back. Then, when you come home and they are so happy to see you, guess where they're dancing? There are always exceptions to this rule, but this section aims to help you train your puppy to accept (and eventually love) the crate.

As long as your dog isn't peeing or pooping in the crate, you can make it comfy for him by adding lots of blankets or beds. Just make sure he doesn't eat them and make sure he doesn't begin to eliminate on them since they're absorbent. As long as neither of those happen, this is a great way to help your dog acclimate.

The crate needs to be in a socially central, well travelled area of the house, not tucked away in the basement. If your puppy feels isolated, he will not like his crate.

Leave the door open for him so he can go in and out as he likes while you are watching, and if he's reluctant to go inside, tie the door open or take it off at first. Create positive experiences by feeding him in his crate. You can also throw toys and treats in there every time you pass by the crate. This will entice him to frequently go in and out and feel more comfortable in the crate, as it often has fun surprises. Soon enough, he'll associate the crate with pleasant things. Soon enough you'll have a puppy who eagerly bounds in and out of the crate.

You want to put your puppy in the crate whenever you can't watch him. Frequent short visits will help him get used to it—just a few minutes at a time with you hanging out nearby where he can see you. When you need to shut your puppy into the crate, your puppy may whine or bark. This is natural—they want to be with you, not away from you. However, it's to their benefit to be in a safe place where they can't get into anything potentially dangerous.

Don't let your puppy out of the crate while he's whining or barking or throwing a fit. (If your dog is truly panicking, let him out and consult a trainer.) Dogs can quickly learn that whining and barking get them out of the crate, and so they will bark and whine longer and louder. Teach him that being quiet in the crate is the key to getting out of the crate. Ignoring them for short crating sessions will, for most dogs, be enough to teach them to stop—if they are quiet they get praise and let out of the kennel, while they get nothing if they are loud. If you have a dog on your hands that is really being loud and obnoxious, wait for the millisecond of quiet while they are drawing in the breath to bark more, and use that millisecond to let them out.

There are some dogs who need more help—in these cases it's best if you ask an experienced trainer or behavior expert in your area for advice.