

## Potty Training

This is something that a lot of owners struggle with so don't feel bad if you find yourself struggling too. We humans put a lot of rules around otherwise very natural behaviors that our dogs exhibit which can make life hard for all of us when there's a communication breakdown. Rules aren't bad! They just need to be explained clearly and when they aren't we start to have problems. Most dogs don't actually "*know*" that they aren't supposed to potty in the house. If they *did* know that then why would they do it? If they *know* they're going to get in trouble for pottying in the house and that if they just ask to go out their needs will be met then why don't they *do* that? Short answer: because they *don't* actually know, but they *do* still need to relieve themselves. If they don't relieve themselves their bladder or intestines could rupture and ultimately they'd die from infection, shock, or internal bleeding. Not to mention, needing to use the bathroom and holding it in is uncomfortable at best and painful at worst. Relieving themselves provides an immediate relief from that discomfort or pain and thus reinforces them for pottying wherever it is that they just relieved themselves whether that's somewhere we'd deem appropriate (in the grass, on mulch, a gravel patch, etc.) or not (on the carpet, bed, wood floor, etc.).

Potty training is all about identifying your dog's signals for, "I need to pee/poop and I'm looking for a spot to do that," and then ensuring that they're on a surface that you'd deem appropriate. If your puppy has only ever had the opportunity to pee/poop on grass then they aren't going to *want* to relieve themselves on a different surface. It'd be like trying to convince yourself to use the bathroom without pulling your pants down first. Totally not something you'd even want to visualize right? A different example would be using the bathroom at your boss's house. A lot of people would find that uncomfortable. Same idea here. The places that your dog relieves themselves most frequently are going to be reinforced and therefore more likely to be used in the future. That means that it's your job to make sure that 90-100% of the time, when your dog relieves themselves, it's on a surface where you're okay with that happening. The 10% buffer is because accidents and mistakes happen. They aren't going to make-or-break your potty training. If you slip up just take a deep breath, let them finish, take them outside in case they have more, and clean it up. They aren't trying to spite you. They felt uncomfortable and took steps to relieve that discomfort because you weren't fast enough. That isn't on them, it's on you. Here's a list of things you can do to help prevent that:

1. Keep a close eye on your dog. If they don't have the opportunity to sneak off and have an accident then they won't do so. While they're awake, young puppies need to go out every 15-20 minutes. So, if your puppy: eats, plays, drinks, or wakes up from sleeping, then they need to go outside.

2. Sleeping puppies have a longer timer. A good rule of thumb is 1 hour for every month, but this *only* applies to *sleeping* puppies. So you can expect a 5 month old puppy to be able to hold its bladder for approximately 5 hours during the night. Less if they were allowed to drink within about an hour of going to bed.
3. If you're leaving the puppy in a room with someone else, get a verbal agreement that they're going to watch your puppy for you. If they don't agree, then don't leave your puppy with them. Put your puppy in a crate or bring them with you.
4. If you can't leave your puppy in a crate, don't have a pen, and they keep wandering off then put a harness/collar on them and clip a leash to your belt. This way they physically can't leave your presence. If you don't have a belt on then loop the leash (for a small puppy) around your ankle or around your waist (for a small or big puppy).
5. Don't fuss at your dog if they start pottying in the house. The connection that they will make isn't that using the bathroom in the house is bad, but rather that using the bathroom *around you* is bad which will decrease the likelihood of them successfully going outside if you're present.
6. Don't fuss at your dog if you find an accident. The connection that they will make isn't that using the bathroom in the house is bad, but rather that being around a mess while also *around you* is bad which will decrease the likelihood of them successfully going outside if you're present since outside will probably smell like the mess that you just berated them for.
7. Spend time with your dog in the areas that they are frequently having accidents. Dogs are less likely to eliminate where they play and live because they are cleanly creatures by-and-large. So, if your puppy is always having accidents in your office which is only used twice a week while your puppy is napping then take them in there to play once a day. This will help them stop thinking of it as a "potty" area.
8. Clean up accidents with an enzymatic cleaner. This truly removes the smell and makes it less of a beacon for pottying in that area again. Other cleaners tend to deposit ammonia scent which is a chemical found in pee and actually can increase the likelihood of your dog having an accident there again in the future.
9. If you find that they are *still* managing to sneak off even with how careful you're being then gate off other areas. Confine them to just a couple of rooms (preferably the easiest ones to clean!) Or keep them on a leash and tether them to you so they just don't have the opportunity to be away from you and access other areas of the house.
10. Reward your dog for successfully using the bathroom outside! This is what you want them to do so while they are having trouble understanding where the bathroom really is it can be helpful to mark, "yes" as soon as your pup squats to

pee or poop in an appropriate area and then providing them with verbal praise and a treat as soon as they are done. This isn't necessary since they're getting reinforced by the act of relieving themselves, but it can help to provide extra incentive too!

11. Close doors or set up baby gates to block off areas of the home where it is hard to supervise your puppy.
12. Purchase a metal or plastic x-pen for your puppy to go in when you are unable to supervise your puppy.
13. Any time you bring your puppy out of their x-pen, kennel, or other confined area take them outside first. Even if they were just out a few minutes ago. Better safe than sorry.
14. Remember: every time you let your puppy potty in the house, they're learning that the house is an appropriate place to relieve themselves.
15. Don't leave your puppy with free access to water if they're having consistent issues. Offer them an opportunity to drink once every 1-2 hours. This will keep them hydrated while preventing them from becoming over hydrated to the point that they're having accidents more frequently than they would otherwise.
16. Keep an "accident tracking sheet" plus a log of when the puppy has gone out and what they did. The "accident tracking sheet" should have a space for: the date, time of day, what type of accident it was (pee/poop), and who was responsible for watching the puppy at that time. The log sheet should have space for: the date, time of day, and what the puppy did while outside (pee/poop/nothing).
17. If you're continuously struggling after doing everything listed here and it seems like your puppy is really inconsistent about when they need to go or seems like they need to go more frequently than you'd expect, please consult your vet. It's possible that your puppy has a UTI or other health issue that's causing frequent and urgent pottying. Medical intervention may be necessary and vet care may be all that's needed to solve any accident issues your puppy is having.