

The 10 Rules to Effectively & Positively House-Training Your Dog

Depending on your dog, your family and your lifestyle, house-training a dog can be anywhere from easy, to almost impossible. Many dog owners get lucky and, in spite of the mistakes they unknowingly make, they find themselves with a house-trained dog. On the other hand, some dog owners need help from a dog trainer or dog behavior counselor. Even a small number of these pet owners may become desperate when everything they do, even under professional counsel, seems futile. Believe me, I am a professional and I had a small dog from a rescue situation once that had me pulling out all the stops. After ten days we were well on our way!

The more difficult house-training cases to crack are those of dogs that, by mistake, have become 'reverse' house-trained by their owners. 'Reverse' house-training results when dogs have been allowed to go to the bathroom inside the home and then been inadvertently reinforced for doing so.

Other difficult house-training cases include puppies from pet stores, puppy mills and backyard breeders where the puppies have been raised in contained, unsanitary conditions. Since they have no alternative, these puppies eat and sleep in the same area they use as their bathroom. So, when you bring a new puppy or rescue dog into your home, or if you have an older dog that is not yet house-trained, follow our '10 Rules to House-training' and you should be relieved (no pun intended) to find you have a house-trained dog in 10 days that will then require ongoing supervision to ensure long lasting results.

Managing the Environment

1. The first thing you need to do before you start your house-training plan is to ensure your home is free from urine stains and residual odors. Purchase a black light and a pet odor remover from your local pet store. When it is dark, turn off all the lights and thoroughly inspect your home, carpets, furniture and tiled areas. The black light will reveal any old stains so you can effectively clean and remove them. There are many very effective pet stain/odor cleaning products available on the market.
2. If you don't already have one, purchase a good quality wire crate that is large enough for your dog to stand up, lie down and turn around in. Position the crate in a quiet, but not isolated part of your home. You will also need three Kongs (chew toys you can stuff with treats), a squeaky toy, a nylon collar and a 6 ft. nylon leash. If you have a puppy that may need to spend more time contained then an X-Pen is a great tool. This gives them room to play and move around. You can also insert a crate into the X-Pen or build the X-Pen around the crate.
3. Develop and follow a 24-hour management schedule of potty breaks. This is critical because you don't want your puppy to have an accident. Your schedule should include meals, play time, training time, bathroom breaks and sleep time for the entire 10-day program. Bathroom breaks should be scheduled every 4 hours, except overnight when you can allow 6 hours. The plan should also include two or three feeding sessions, one in the morning, one at midday and the last one no later than 6 p.m. Be careful giving your dog access to drinking water after 8 p.m. or 3 hours

before she goes into her crate to sleep for the night until you are comfortable they can last the night out.

4. If you can't be home during the midday break, either schedule some time off work or hire a dog walker or pet sitter that can help you with that portion of your house-training schedule. This will be vital for success. Remember you want to plan for all contingencies so there are no errors. Prevention of errors while building up and reinforcing behaviors in the correct location are key to this program.
5. Keep a daily journal of your dog's eating schedule and bathroom habits. Note when your dog urinates and defecates. Note the exact time your dog eats and any other treats she is given during the day. Your journal will help you determine how long after eating and drinking your dog typically needs to use the bathroom. You can use this information to adjust your schedule if necessary.
6. Your dog's day will include meals, sleep, play, training and bathroom breaks. During each of these periods the dog is either in her crate or tethered to you. Give your dog a Kong stuffed with yummy treats for mental enrichment while she is in her crate. Your dog must be supervised 100 percent of the time during the house-training period. When the dog is tethered to you, watch for signs of needing to go to the bathroom. If you notice your dog sniffing the ground, walking in circles or looking uncomfortable then quickly take her outside to her designated bathroom area and follow rule number 7.

Training the Behavior

7. At the scheduled bathroom times, take your dog from her crate on a leash, and take her to her designated bathroom area. Keep your dog on her 6 ft. leash but let her explore while you stand in one spot. Initially ignore your dog. Because your dog is not getting any attention from you and there will be limited things of interest to explore in the restricted area defined by the leash, she will eventually go to the bathroom. If you engage in play your dog may "forget" to go to the bathroom. This is how accidents happen. Owners go back inside thinking their dog does not need the bathroom, the puppy is then put into a quiet boring environment and they go to the toilet!!
8. Once your dog has finished, praise her with 'good doggie.' Give her lots of attention and treats. Have a little celebration with your dog. This lets your dog know that her behavior is remarkable and deserves praise. You **MUST** create a situation where your dog wants to go to the bathroom in that particular area and then has a party of fun, attention and toys. Why would your dog choose to go anywhere else when this location predicts so much fun!
9. Only after your dog has been to the bathroom should she be let off the leash to play or taken for her 'long' walk. This ensures that your dog will soon learn that the more quickly she completes her bathroom behavior, the more quickly she will get her reward of treats, play, her walk - or all three. **ALWAYS** exercise or play with or train your dog for at least 10 minutes before you take her back inside to her crate. You don't want your dog associating their bathroom behavior with an end to play and outside time and back to a boring crate!

Developing the Relationship

10. When dogs are exposed to consistent, accident-free house-training systems you will be surprised at how quickly they learn. With the right level of commitment and conscientious use of a training schedule, you can train a dog to be solidly house-trained in 10 days. This means the dog will indicate to you that she would like to go outside. It does not mean that if you leave a young dog unsupervised and miss their signals that they need the bathroom they will not have an accident. Remember also that with puppies you cannot expect them to hold their toilet behaviors for very long. They have small tummies and eat more often than a mature dog so food is constantly moving through their intestines.