

Potty Training Puppies and Adult Dogs

Natural Instincts

At birth a newborn puppy is unable to eliminate its own waste; the mother licks the puppies to stimulate elimination and in doing so, cleans up as she goes. At around three weeks of age the puppies begin to soil for themselves; mom continues to maintain cleanliness in the nesting area. It is instinctive for dogs to avoid soiling their sleeping or eating areas. As the puppies become more physically capable, they will attempt to move away from the nesting area to potty. This can be further assisted by providing the litter with a different floor surface outside their bedding. The puppies will instinctively seek an absorbent area to potty, such as grass/soil or carpet. As the puppies continue to mature, they will attempt to move further away from their own living area. However, like our own toddlers, the puppies will have accidents; mom will continue to keep the nest clean and will not scold or reprimand a puppy for any mistakes.



Introducing the Puppy to a New Home

If we never interfered with the pottying habits of a puppy living in our home, simply cleaned up without comment, the puppy's instincts would have him clean in your home by adulthood. However, due to a variety of reasons (usually human interference) many puppies' instincts in regard to potty training become confused. The following program for hurrying potty training along is suitable for all physically sound puppies from eight weeks of age:

- The puppy cannot possibly understand that your entire house is the pack's living area to be kept clean - so do not give him/her full access to your home to allow pottying in inappropriate locations. Restrict the puppy's access by a combination of any of the following means:
 - Crate training
 - Condition the puppy to accept being placed in a small room such as the laundry or bathroom (where accidents can be easily cleaned up)
 - Condition the puppy to be on leash, secured to the leg of a table; or give the puppy your **full and undivided attention**. You will need to take the puppy outside, on leash, to the grassy area where you would like him/her to potty, every 30 minutes to begin with. If he/she obliges, reward with tidbits of a favorite food treat, reserved for this occasion and/or a game. Our aim is to minimize the number of inappropriate "accidents" and to reward pottying in the appropriate location. Keeping the container of treats at the pottying location can assist in helping the puppy remember what it is that gets a treat in this scenario.
- If the instructions in the above paragraph are followed precisely, the puppy will not have the opportunity to make mistakes and we will be constantly rewarding the correct behavior. However, if the puppy does manage to potty in the wrong location, **do not reprimand or show your disapproval in any way**. You will not teach the puppy not to potty in the house, you will simply be teaching him/her not to potty in your presence - then when you go to the grassy potty spot, puppy will not want to potty while you are watching for fear of reprimand. Furthermore, when you return indoors, the puppy will take the first opportunity to find an appropriate spot (your bedroom or the living room - anywhere away from his/her own sleeping and eating areas) to eliminate, when you're not watching!

- Watch for the obvious times that your puppy will need to potty, such as after a meal or a big drink; upon waking up; after a play session; and any other time in between! Ensure that the puppy is guided to the correct potty location at these times.
- If, while watching your puppy in your house, you observe the pre-potting behaviors such as sniffing, circling, etc. (it will vary from one puppy to the next), rush the puppy to the correct potty location, keeping him/her close to floor level so that they can see how to get there themselves.
- Thoroughly clean the areas where the puppy has had accidents. The scent of previous droppings will stimulate a puppy to stop and potty then and there. Use this fact to your advantage by collecting up any droppings and placing them in the grassy area where you would like the puppy to potty - he/she will believe that this area is his/her chosen potty. It is best to choose an enzyme cleaner for urine. Other products mask the odor while enzyme cleaners digest the bacteria and remove the source of the odor.
- Ensure that your puppy is kept clean of feces. Long coated breeds, in particular, can get themselves in a mess. If a puppy is constantly soiled, he/she has no reason to keep the living area clean.
- Feeding your puppy indoors and locating water bowls indoors will hasten the understanding that these areas are not suitable for potting.
- Take the blame for any mistakes yourself - you were not paying sufficient attention. Your puppy's mom cleaned up without scolding - attempting to reprimand the puppy for a bodily function will only create anxiety. REMEMBER: the puppy is not suffering from guilt when you walk into the room where he/she has had an accident - he/she simply knows that the presence of a puddle or pile and you in the same room is bad news!

Most puppies will be showing a vast improvement by 12 weeks of age, though still having occasional accidents. Potty training is a natural process and will happen unaided in most instances. However, there will be a wide range of ease or difficulty from one pup to the next. Try to remain calm and accepting - your stress will be obvious to your puppy and may undermine his/her confidence and trust in you as a consistent, reliable-natured care taker, capable of taking care of their needs and providing protection.

Adult Dogs and Potty Training

You can implement the above procedures for older dogs experiencing potty training difficulties. If you are not having success, the problem may be occurring for a range of possible medical reasons and specific assessment and an individual program may be required. Consult with your vet first, then seek the advice of a professional trainer.

Questions? Contact:

Kansas City Pet Project

Training Team

behavior@kcpetproject.org

816-683-1383