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Housetraining The Adult Dog

Newly adopted dogs may not be housetrained and not all dogs have learned to signal when they need to go outside. If you recently adopted your dog, or your dog has been with you for a while, but their housetraining changed when you moved or visited someone else’s house, follow these guidelines for success.

Rule Out Health Concerns

There are times when housetraining problems are medical and not behavioral. If your dog has been accident-free for six months or longer and starts having accidents or if you see these signs, contact your dog’s veterinarian:

* Your dog urinates multiple times in short periods of time or in small amounts.
* Diarrhea that lasts more than a few days.
* Frequently licking the urinary area.
* You notice they are drinking significantly more water than usual.
* Unexplained weight loss or gain without diet change.
* Sudden increase/decrease in appetite.
* They “drip” urine or release bladder/bowels without seeming aware of what’s happening.

Once you’ve ruled out heath causes, follow these steps to housetrain your adult dog.

Set A Housetraining Schedule

Schedules are important for success.  Fortunately, dog potty habits are fairly predictable. The most common times are:

* Immediately after waking in the morning
* Within 15 minutes after eating
* During high activity/play
* Immediately after waking from naps
* Before bed

By taking your dog out at these times, your dog will soon have a regular schedule.

Accident Zones

Dogs generally avoid soiling the spaces where they eat, sleep, and play.  Accidents often happen in lesser-used areas of the home, like hallways or bedrooms where they don’t sleep.

Use baby gates and closed doors to keep your dog out of these accident zones until their housetraining is more reliable.

Confinement Area

One of the biggest housetraining mistakes is to give the dog too much freedom inside when we’re away. By creating a confinement area where you dog can be comfortable when you’re gone but isn’t like to soil, you can prevent accidents.

The best area for your dog will depend on your available space and your dog’s preferences. Some dogs may do well in a bathroom with a baby gate across the door, while other dogs prefer a larger space, like the kitchen.

Make this area comfortable with a bed, fresh water, and chew toys. Smaller dogs mahy need puppy pads or a dog litter box.

NOTE: All dogs will need training to acclimate being left alone, if they are not already. Build them up slowly to feeding them and giving them special chews or stuffed Kongs™ for gradually longer periods of time.

Troubleshooting

If you have a yard, go out with your dog or watch them to make sure they have eliminated before you give them free access inside. Don’t assume that they don’t need to “go” if they only stand at the door. Go outside with them to reduce the stress of being isolated from you.

If your dog won’t relieve themselves outside or on walks, but has an accident shortly after they come back in the house, you may need to take additional steps.

When you return inside, keep the dog with you on leash or in a confinement area. Wait 15 minutes, then head outside again. Repeat the process until they relieve themselves. Now they can be loose inside again.

Accidents Happen

Your dog has been doing great for months, when suddenly you find a mess.  Everyone makes mistakes when they are first learning! But if you see repeated accidents, something’s gone wrong.

* Rule out health causes
* Double-check their schedule
* Make sure they are “going” before you bring them inside
* Don’t give them free access inside if they haven’t gone yet

Punishment

Never punish your dog for accidents. This can create a number of problems. Your dog may become afraid to “go” in front of you, even on walks. They can also react with aggression if they feel threatened.

If you catch your dog in the act, try to coax them outside with a gentle voice as you move towards the door. You can also have your dog wear a short leash inside that you can grab and gently guide them outside. Avoid grabbing them by the collar, as that can trigger aggression in some dogs.

If your dog has an accident when you’re away, the training moment has passed. Any scolding or punishment at this time won’t be associated with the earlier accident.

Clean the accident and review the steps above to see what was missed and the changes you can make to prevent other accidents in the future.

Cleaning Up

Use an oxidized cleaner for accidents. For urine, make sure you allow the cleaner to soak through to the pad. Don’t hesitate to steam clean your carpets, since this can remove the odors that may draw your dog back to those areas.