

Positively Obedient Canines

Houstraining Made Easy

Houstraining is something that many dog owners struggle with, usually through giving too much freedom too soon. The good news is that many houstraining issues resolve with a back to basics approach. If you are starting with a new puppy, the points below will help you have issue-free houstraining.

- Pick a spot outside to use during the initial houstraining phase. This is where you will take your dog on leash every time you go outside for him/her to go to the washroom – so pick it with that in mind! Later on when your dog is reliable in the house this can be changed.
- Select a space inside your home for your dog to be when you cannot focus all of your attention on him/her. This could be a crate, an x-pen, or a small room behind a baby gate depending on the age of your dog. This will help prevent accidents in the house as dogs don't like to soil where they sleep.
- Resolve that, when your dog is inside, he/she will be in his/her safe space or in the same room as an adult who is watching him/her.
- Feed your dog on a regular schedule. This will enable you to create a routine and predict when your dog might need to go outside to eliminate.
- For puppies: In the beginning plan to take them outside as soon as they wake up from sleeping, 20-30 minutes after eating or having a large drink, after a rowdy play session, or every hour when awake.
- For adults: In the beginning plan to take them outside first thing in the morning, 20-30 minutes after eating, and every couple of hours throughout the day.
- Take your dog out on leash to the designated outdoor spot. Stand still and let him/her sniff. Give him/her about a 6' radius in which to sniff. Once elimination is complete – praise and give a small treat. You may want to wait a little bit longer to see if he/she needs to defecate as well – you will get to know when your dog is likely to need to do so. Most adults on good quality food will need to defecate one to two times a day. You can spend some time walking around or playing after elimination before returning indoors.
- Once your dog has several successful days going to the designated spot outside, start to introduce a cue such as "Go potty," or "Hurry up," or "Go pee," as you see him/her starting to squat. This pairing of the behaviour and the word will become a cue to let your dog know what you are expecting. It is extremely handy to have a dog that will eliminate on cue when traveling – take your dog out of the car, go to a strange stretch of grass and give a cue. It is also helpful if you need your dog to eliminate before you leave the house for a while.
- Watch for cues that your dog needs to go outside. Some dogs will go to the door. Some will come and stare at people. You can start to shape your dog's tendency into a cue telling you that he/she needs to go out by recognizing it, saying "Do you have to go outside?" and taking him/her outside. Alternatively you can bell train your dog to ring a bell to communicate when he/she needs to go outside.
- Once your dog has been accident-free for a month, you can start to make some changes. Reduce the frequency at which you take him/her outside. You can gradually reduce the number of treats you give; don't stop them cold turkey, but you no longer need to reward every elimination. (continued)

- Make sure your dog will eliminate in different locations. If you ever want to take your dog to any location from which a return home for elimination is impossible, you will need to generalize your cue to different locations. Most dogs will start marking and urinating while on walks, just make sure yours will defecate at other locations also. You can start by picking a different spot in the yard to go to – keep everything else the same and use your cue word. As soon as you sense that your dog is likely to need to eliminate, promptly go for a walk, pause at an appropriate spot and give your cue.

Common Housetraining Mistakes:

- Failure to supervise. A new puppy or dog with the run of an entire house can easily find a spot in it to eliminate.
- Punishment. Punishing a dog that has had an accident can create a negative association not with eliminating in the house, but with your presence and elimination. The next time you take your dog outside they may look at you like “you’ve got to be crazy, no way am I peeing while you’re around!” and you end up standing out there for a long time, only to return indoors and have your dog eliminate in a different room. IF you catch your dog in the act indoors, and they are not a fearful or sensitive dog you may make a startle noise and promptly relocate him/her outside. For some dogs, even a startle noise will be too much.
- Immediately ending a walk when your dog eliminates. Dogs are not dumb – if a dog enjoys going on walks, but you always turn around and go back when he/she eliminates he/she will start to delay eliminating for as long as he/she can, and you will be walking longer, and longer and longer. To avoid this, when you go for a walk, go for a walk for a predetermined distance or time. If your dog eliminates on the way, fine. Carry on.
- Putting the dog outside. In the beginning, you need to go outside with your dog. If you don’t, you won’t know if your dog eliminated or spent the whole time sniffing the yard. If you just reward your dog when he/she comes back to the door, then returning to the door is the behavior you are rewarding, not the act of eliminating outside. When your dog is solid in his/her housetraining (no accidents for 3 months) you can start to take him/her out in your fenced yard off leash and hang back a bit. Gradually you can increase your distance to waiting for them indoors. If you don’t have a fenced yard I recommend you use a tether or tie out if you aren’t going to go outside with your dog. This will keep your dog safe while outside without you.

Still having trouble?

- Discuss with your veterinarian – your dog may have a medical issue that is interfering with his/her ability to wait to eliminate
- If your dog is eliminating in his/her safe area consider medical issues and separation issues. Once you rule those out try a smaller area. Crates should be big enough for a dog to stand up, turn around and lay down. If they are too big dogs can eliminate in one end and sleep in the other.