

Housetraining

One of my most memorable consultations was for a dog that was lifting his leg to urinate in the house. I suggested to the owner that, before I came over, he shine a black light around the house to see where the urine had been deposited. Black lights can detect organic deposits that the naked eye cannot see, such as urine and mold. He was to then use an enzyme cleaner to thoroughly clean those areas. When I arrived at his recently-built home, he met me at the front door. In his hand was a black light, with several hundred feet of extension cords attached to it. He invited me in and very excitedly walked me through the entire house, upstairs and down. They were everywhere: the unmistakable stains, all at about the same level up the wall. Not one room, hallway or piece of furniture had been spared.



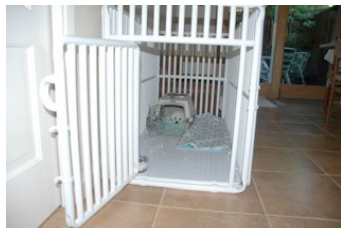
While the above case may seem extreme, it was resolved exactly the same way any other inappropriate elimination problem is resolved: supervision so the dog can't make a mistake, giving the dog every opportunity to get it right, and then rewarding the successes heavily. Sounds easy, but then why do so many dogs keep having "accidents?"

First, let's clarify a few things:

- Just because the dog can hold it all night does not mean he can hold it all day. Their bodies slow down at night, just like ours do.
- Dogs don't eliminate in the house because they are angry with their owner. You don't pee in your boss's office if you are mad at him, do you? If a dog goes in the house, it's because he had to go, isn't housetrained, couldn't hold it, or possibly he was anxious because the owner has left him alone.
- Don't punish your dog for going in the wrong place. You wouldn't punish a toddler for going in his training pants, would you? It serves no purpose. Punishing does not teach your dog where you want him to go. It can confuse him, make him fearful of you, and teach him it is dangerous to go in your presence.
- Dogs do not consider elimination to be wrong. When a dog is admonished or punished, owners feel they have proof the dog knows he was wrong because he looks "guilty." Dogs communicate primarily through body language. What we humans interpret as guilt is actually a dog's reaction to our body language. If we are angry, they sense danger. They react to us the way they would if one of their own species was being aggressive toward them. They cower, look away, tail down, ears back. This is a dog saying "don't hurt me, I am no threat." They have absolutely no idea that your anger has anything to do with where they went to the bathroom.

Whether you have a new puppy, an adult dog that was never trained, or an adopted dog that has lost his housetraining skills while in a kennel, the procedure is identical. Consistency is critical. Housetraining can be accomplished very quickly if you do these three things:

- 1. Watch your dog, watch your dog, watch your dog.** Don't let your dog roam the house and then get angry when you find he's gone to the bathroom somewhere. Not fair! Allowing an untrained dog of any age to roam freely through the house is the equivalent of letting a baby with no diapers explore your house by himself. YIKES! If you don't want your dog to go to the bathroom in certain places (your rug, your bedroom, etc.) then simply do not give your dog access to those areas. When you can't watch your dog, even for a second, put him in a short-term (crate) or long-term (ex-pen or bathroom) confinement area. Until your dog learns the appropriate place to go, the forbidden places are off-limits, no exceptions.



- 2. Provide opportunities for success.** Until you know how often your dog needs to go, take him to the preferred elimination area every hour. Either take him on a leash or cordon off an area where you want him to go. There should be minimal distractions (no kids running, no cats, etc.). Do not allow him to explore the rest of the yard until after he has eliminated. If he doesn't go within 5 minutes, take him inside and crate him for 15 minutes. Then take him back outside. If he does not go within 5 minutes, take inside and crate him for another 15 minutes. Continue until he finally goes. If the process took 2 hours, then try increasing the time between potty trips to 2 hours, and so on. Use the same procedure for training to litter pan or potty pads.



- 3. Reward, reward, reward.** The consequences of eliminating in the right place will teach your dog that is THE place to go! So make the consequences hugely rewarding. When he's finished, give five little pieces of a fabulous food that he doesn't get any other time. Dole them out one after the other right there on the spot while spewing over-the-top praise. If his potty place is outside, then give him some freedom to explore the wonderland of the great outdoors before bringing him back in the house. If you are fairly certain your dog is empty, give him some supervised freedom in the house by playing and training with him before putting him back in his confinement area.

Your dog cannot be housetrained without your help, so don't let him down. Your diligence and consistency will be rewarded with a housetrained dog that can enjoy more freedom. He'll develop a preference for going in the place that earns him a reward. And you can save that black light for your next 70's party!



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