



Potty Training

Potty training is one of the simplest yet most difficult skill to teach when raising a new puppy. It takes a significant investment of time in the beginning, but the rewards last the lifetime of your dog. I cannot stress enough how important it is to teach potty training as early as possible. Put this at the top of the list in his education.

To start potty training your puppy, you will need:

- **Crate.** Large enough for him to get up and turn around, but not so large that he could eliminate in a corner and be just fine napping in another corner.
- **Leash.** To take him out to go potty.
- **Treats.** For pottying, you will want a very high value treat such as roasted chicken, hot dogs or cheese.

Dogs love schedules and routines and these are essential in potty training your puppy. Do not free feed your puppy. While it may be convenient to just fill up his bowl whenever it is empty, it does not make his elimination schedule predictable and thus, you cannot reward him for proper potty habits consistently. Decide on the times you want to feed your puppy. For example: a) 7a, 1p and 7p for puppies or b) 7a and 7p for adolescent and adult dogs.

He will definitely need to go potty shortly after he wakes up, drinks, eats or plays hard. Plus, in the beginning more frequent intervals to be able to keep ahead of his elimination ability.

The typical protocol is if he goes potty in the spot when you tell him, he has earned a treat and supervised freedom. If he does

not, then he is confined in a crate for a short duration and taken outside for another opportunity to go.

Here is a basic plan to start with:

- When you wake up in the morning, put the leash on your puppy (have treats on you) and run to the potty spot. The running jiggles his bladder and increases the likelihood he will go potty. When you get to the designated potty spot say, *Fido, Go Potty.*
- Remain in that spot for up to 2 minutes. If he goes potty, reward him right after he has finished (not during) with a *Good Boy* and treat, 3 times. Then go back in the house. If he does not go potty, he goes in his crate for 10 minutes and repeat the process until he goes.
- Even if you have a yard and you think you do not care where he chooses to eliminate, have him on leash with you. You will know exactly when he goes potty and can reward him to let him know that is exactly what you want. And think about it, do you really want him to go anywhere in the yard? Would it not be more effective to teach him to go in one particular spot rather than having land mines throughout the yard?
- After his first potty, it is time to feed him. I recommend hand feeding for the first couple of days. He will learn that the food comes directly from you and will be less inclined to be protective of the food bowl. If he does not eat all of it within 10 minutes, remove the food. He will learn that he needs to eat right away or he has to wait until the next meal time.

- A few minutes after he has finished eating, he is ready for another potty break. With your puppy back on leash and high value treats in pocket, run to the designated potty spot, give the cue, *Fido, Go Potty* and wait for up to 2 minutes. Dogs have a higher metabolism than us and can process food more quickly. He should poop at this point, so be sure to wait the 2 minutes for him to poop.
- If he goes potty, he has earned up to an hour of supervised freedom. Then you will take him back out to go potty. If he does not go potty, he goes back in the crate for 10 minutes and the potty process is repeated.
- Keep the 60 minutes of supervised freedom for 2 days. Then increase the time by 15 minutes every 2 days. If he has an accident, back up the time to the previous successful schedule for an additional day or two. He may have been asked to hold it longer than he is capable of at that moment in the developmental process.
- During the night, there is a high probability he will need to go out. If he whimpers to go out, take him out, but note the time. The next night set your alarm 30 minutes prior to that time. You do not want him to learn that whining will always get him out of the crate.

The supervised freedom means that he cannot be alone in a room. You would not leave a toddler in a room alone. Just like a toddler, your puppy can get into things he should not and accidents can happen (that you may not find for days).

If you cannot supervise your puppy then put him in his crate or small confined area (such as a playpen) until you can supervise.

If you want to watch a movie at night and not be interrupted with constant potty breaks, he can be in his crate. This will help him build up the strength in his bladder to hold it longer than the 60 minutes. If he is asleep in his crate when it is potty time, let him sleep; just keep an eye on him to see when he wakes up. He will need to go out quickly.

A general rule of thumb for the maximum amount of hours he can be in the crate is: take the number of months old he is and add 1. So for example, you have an 8 week old puppy, you can expect him to be able to hold it in his crate for 3 hours. Once you start your potty training schedule, he will be able to hold it longer and longer.

Puppies develop differently. So, do not be discouraged if a friend's puppy can hold it longer than yours. The real test will be when your puppy reaches adolescence (around 5-7 months). Many puppies that were fantastic in the early stages will hit the teenage months and all of the sudden act like they have no recollection of potty training.

Prevention creates good habits. If he does make a mistake, roll up a newspaper, hit your head with it and say, *Bad human!* He was probably pushed too long to hold it.

Do not scold your puppy. Punishing him for soiling in the house teaches your dog to eliminate in a more secretive spot and not in front of you.

It sounds like a lot of work to potty train a puppy. And it is! But the rewards are endless. A month of investment in proper potty training will yield years of relief.

If you need additional help with potty training, please give me a call.