

Behavior Solutions: House-Training

Of all the aspects of dog ownership, house-training is the most prominent and the most important. From the first day a dog comes into his new home, there is a sense of urgency that pushes us to house-train him as quickly and thoroughly as possible. But, just like any other kind of training, house-training requires patience, persistence, and an understanding of your dog's instinctive habits. Once your dog is properly trained, he'll be calmer and happier with his daily routine—and you will, too!

Reasons for House-Training

A clean, hygienic living environment is imperative for you and your family, and pets must be made aware of your requirements. Once your dog understands the dos and don'ts of his bodily functions, you will have laid the groundwork for additional training from Starmark (check our Web site, www.aboutdogtraining.com, for ideas) and you will be well on your way to a great relationship with your pet as well.

The need for house-training your dog is not only important; it is immediate. Have a plan for house-training in place *before* you bring your new dog home, and implement it right away. This is not only for reasons of hygiene but also because your dog must understand that there are certain behaviors he is expected to learn, and that you are the one to look to for guidance.

Here's the Scoop

The first step in changing your dog's potty habits is to avoid those time-worn methods that have been proven to be both wrong and counterproductive. Dogs live in the present—they think only about what they are doing and what is going on around them at that moment—so punishment after the fact is ineffective and futile. Rubbing your dog's nose in his feces, showing it to him and making a scene, or scolding him after the job has already been done will only confuse him. Consider this scenario: Your dog has urinated on the rug without you seeing him. As you walk into the room, he runs toward you. At the same time you notice the spot on the rug and reprimand him. The last thing your dog was doing was running toward you, so in his mind this is what he is being punished for.

You must catch your dog in the act for any correction to be an effective deterrent to that behavior. Similarly, you must reward your dog immediately when he does something right, such as eliminate in his designated area, to clearly identify acceptable behavior. The Pro-Training Clicker is a great way to mark a behavior and to say “Well done,” quickly and consistently, by clicking and rewarding your dog when he does the right thing. (For a full guide and streaming video lessons on how to use the Pro-Training Clicker, please visit www.starmarkacademy.com.)

Next, establish a reward history with your dog by taking him on leash to his potty area so you can immediately praise and reward him with a treat when he eliminates there.

Taking your dog on leash to his potty area will allow you to guide him to the proper place and immediately reward the action. Waiting until after he is finished and on his way back inside allows too much time to pass for your reward to be meaningful. It is

important to establish the correct behavior in your presence so that if you later catch him eliminating in the house and have to reprimand him, it will be clear that it is only the chosen area that is unacceptable, not the act of eliminating in your presence.

Your objective is to prevent the elimination behavior *before* it starts, and this requires a certain amount of vigilance on your part. You must stop him each time you catch him eliminating inside your home and reward him each time he goes in the right spot outdoors. Remember, consistency and patience are the keys to minimizing your dog's confusion and helping him to understand what the desired behavior is.

If you notice pre-elimination behavior, like circling, squatting, or selecting some light reading material, immediately take your dog outside, preferably on leash, to his designated area and reward him with a treat when he eliminates there. If you catch your dog in the act somewhere in your home, distract him with a shaker can (a metal can with several pennies or pebbles inside) or other noisy disruption. Then immediately take him on leash outside and reward him with a treat when he eliminates where he's supposed to eliminate. After you have established a reward history with your dog, you can make him understand that the floor is not his potty area by simple repetition. If you can catch him eliminating in the house and correct him, as outlined above, at least five times, he should understand that this behavior is unacceptable.

When you take your dog for a walk, allow him to eliminate and reward him before you begin your walk. Many people walk their dogs just until they eliminate, then take them straight home. This often results in the dogs waiting to eliminate for as long as they can

in order to make the walk last longer. If you allow your dog to eliminate first and then go for your walk, he will learn to eliminate more quickly so that the walk can begin.

Potties for Your Pooch

Most of us have better things to do than catch a dog in the act of soiling a carpet, and there are sure to be times when you can't personally supervise your dog. In those instances when you will be busy or away for a short time, confine him in his crate. Refer to Starmark's "Behavior Solutions: Crate Training" on for advice. Since dogs are naturally clean animals, they do not want to eliminate in the place they live and will tend to wait until you take them outside. That's why you should always allow your dog to eliminate prior to putting him in the crate. As soon as you get home, take your dog on leash to his designated potty area and immediately praise and reward him when he finishes. Remember that puppies and small-breed dogs have small bladders that don't hold much, so they will need to eliminate frequently.

If you must be away for a longer period, you can set up a dog-proofed area in your home. Use a small bathroom or utility room with all cords and wires covered and anything your dog could potentially get into put away. Keep your dog comfortable and happy in his area with a bed, water, interactive chew toys, and a potty area. Starmark's Everlasting Treat Ball will keep your dog active and stimulated when you have to leave him home alone in his crate or dog-proofed area. It's great to use as a special toy he receives only when he is left alone, and he can even eat his meals out of it. Refer to Starmark's "Behavior Solution: Problem Prevention" on for more ideas on how to use the Everlasting Treat Ball.

Create a potty area using a dog litter box or similar containment filled with the material the dog would ordinarily use outside. If he is accustomed to using grass, fill the box with sod; if he is used to dirt or sand, use that; or even concrete if he is a city dog and that is what he is used to. These materials will have to be cleaned each day for sanitation purposes. Pads and newspapers are not recommended for several reasons. Since dogs are not generally accustomed to using these materials outside, introducing them could cause confusion when making the transition to eliminating only outside. Also, your dog will not be able to distinguish between his potty-paper and your morning newspaper, and clean up can be messy.

Naturally, larger dogs will need a larger elimination area. If you cannot find a litter box or similar containment big enough for your dog, a piece of linoleum or small kiddie pool will do. Linoleum is available at most hardware or home-supply stores and can be cut to any size you want. Use it to cover and protect your floor, and overlay it with sod, dirt, sand, or concrete as mentioned above. Each time you return, take your dog outside on leash and reward him with a treat for eliminating there. Once he starts using the indoor potty area regularly, you can begin to enlarge his dog-proofed area of confinement to a bathroom and hallway or bedroom. With a consistent reward history your dog will learn that eliminating outside results in a treat, while eliminating inside doesn't, so he will try to hold it for longer periods to get his reward. Over time, he should use the indoor potty area less and less until eventually he will no longer need it. Then you can remove it permanently.

Trainer Developed: Academy Tested

The certified training and behavior specialists at Starmark Animal Behavior Center created this behavior solutions guide with you and your dog's needs in mind. Products mentioned in this guide are available at pet supply retailers, as well as online at our web site: www.aboutdogtraining.com. All products, guides, and videos are tested and approved by the training directors of Starmark Academy, our accredited school for professional dog trainers. It is the hands-on experience of our training division, combined with the vast technical knowledge and experience of the Starmark Academy staff that allows us to bring you useful and unique dog training and behavior solutions. We train dogs just like yours every day; we work with owners just like you every day. Thank you for choosing Starmark, the world leader in pet education.

For additional pet solutions and information about our products, please visit Starmark online at our web sites: www.aboutdogtraining.com; www.schoolfordogtrainers.com; and www.starmarkacademy.com.

Starmark Trainer Recommended Equipment

Pro-Training Clicker— A fast and easy way to teach your dog obedience commands.

It's like saying "Well done," on time, every time your dog does something you like.

Everlasting Treat Ball—A great way to keep your dog happily occupied while in his crate or dog-proofed area. The unique shape of the ball allows it to wobble and roll on its own. It is hollow, so you can hide treats or a meal inside.

Everlasting Treats— Chew treats designed to fit on the ends of the Everlasting Treat Ball. Also great by themselves as tasty snacks.

Pro-Training Treats— Bite-size treats to fit inside the Everlasting Treat Ball. Used alone, these treats are perfect as tasty food rewards during training.

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