

Housetraining troubles can be a real headache, but they are relatively easy to solve by following some basic rules and practices.

## PREVENT MISTAKES

Dogs try not soil the spaces where they eat, sleep, and play. Accidents often happen in hallways, spare bedrooms, dining rooms, and formal living rooms that aren't used very often.

The more freedom your dog has in the house, the more "non-living areas" your dog can find to relieve themselves, so close doors and use baby gates to keep your dog out of these problem areas until their housetraining is more reliable.

Your dog will need an area where they can stay when you are at work or not able to supervise them. This area should contain their bed or crate, water, toys, and dog pads or a dog litterbox.

## HOUSETRAINING SCHEDULE

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

- *Immediately after waking up - including from naps!*
- *Within 1-15 minutes after eating*
- *During high activity/play*
- *Every hour per month of age (e.g., a 4-month-old puppy will need to go out every 4 hours)*

Keep your dog on a regular schedule and take them out at these times to prevent accidents. Your dog should either be under direct supervision or confined all other times.

## LONG TERM CONFINEMENT

If your dog is going to need a potty break while you're gone, you want to provide them with a long-term confinement area. See the *Confinement Training* handout for tips.

## TEACH YOUR DOG WHERE TO GO

Following the schedule above, take your dog out (preferably on leash). Once in the preferred potty area, stand still. No playing or walking until they go potty.

If your dog doesn't go after 5 minutes, return them to their crate or pen for 10 minutes and try again. When they finally go, praise and reward! Now they can be loose inside again, but remember to keep them with you—no wandering off unsupervised!

## LITTERBOX TRAINING DOGS

Yes, you can teach your dog to use a litterbox! This is ideal for small dogs and dogs in apartments, but litterboxes are also great for large puppies during the housetraining process.

## SETTING UP THE LITTERBOX

Look for a “dog litter tray,” a dog crate replacement pan (which come in a variety of sizes), or cut down a large rubber tub into a tray with a shallow lip.

Fill with pellet-style litter, which is made from non-toxic paper, or a strip of sod. Place inside their confinement area. See the *Confinement Training* handout for training tips.

## PUTTING THE LITTERBOX TO USE

When it's time for your dog to go, place them inside their confinement area instead of taking them outside. As soon as they use the litterbox, praise and release them for time with the family.

You can still take your dog outside at potty time so that they learn both options. But litterbox training can be easier and cleaner than puppy pads when you can't be home for potty breaks!

## POTTY SIGNALS

As dogs start to catch on to the routine, they may give signals that they need to go out that aren't obvious.

For example, they may stand by the back door (it's not uncommon for dogs to have “accidents” in this area when they aren't let out in time). They might start demanding your attention.

Watch your dog during the common times that most dogs need a potty break. You might see that they have their own way of letting you know they need out.

## DOORBELL TRAINING

Your dog can learn how to ring a bell to let you know they need to go outside! We like the Pebble Smart Doggie Doorbell (available at [clickertraining.com](http://clickertraining.com)), but you can use a string of bells, as well.

Pick up our handout on *Target Training* to see how to teach your dog to touch something with their nose, then practice having them touch the doorbell before you open the door.

## ACCIDENTS HAPPEN!

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

Look for accidents you might have made, like giving your dog too much freedom too soon, or waiting a little longer than they could hold it. Now, remind yourself and your family to stick with the housetraining schedule.

Never punish your dog for accidents! Dogs aren't being stubborn or bad when they have accidents, and punishment won't teach them where to go. Instead, it could make them afraid to go in front of you, which can lead to problems in the future.

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**STILL STRUGGLING? THE SACRAMENTO SPCA ANIMAL BEHAVIOR TEAM IS HERE TO HELP!**

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