

## **TOILET TRAINING**

As with all other areas of dog training, advice on toilet training is riddled by urban myths, and misinformation that can be potentially detrimental to your puppy.

Before I advise you on the most effective way to toilet train, let's take a look at some of the common myths and what the consequences of pursuing them might be, bearing in mind the old expression "the road to hell is paved with good intentions".

### **Paper Training**

"Make sure you put plenty of newspaper on the floor and when the puppy goes on the paper, praise and reward it a little treat". Yes, this is very good advice if you want your puppy to go on newspaper ... perhaps for the remainder of its life! I would say that the majority of enquiries I receive from dog owners, who are experiencing house training problems, stem from this type of early training. The puppy learns that it is quite acceptable to go inside the house, and as soon as it masters this, we go and change all the rules and become very irate when it fails make the switch to going outside.

You might also find that after you have taken your puppy out for a good long walk, it waits until you return home and then wees on the carpet, roughly in the same area where the newspaper used to be. This can become a very long and drawn out process to correct. So please be very careful when choosing the toilet training method which you would like to follow.

### **Praise And Punishments**

"Praise the puppy when it has goes precisely where you want it to, but when you discover it has gone elsewhere, drag it back to that spot and either rub its nose in it, tap it across its rear, or shout "NO - bad dog not there!"

This very old and very outdated advice contains no ancient wisdom at all. In fact I would go as far as suggesting that it causes many puppies grave and long-term emotional stress. Puppies (and adult dogs) live very much in the here and now. They really do not sit there thinking about what they did five or even ten minutes ago. So there you are lying quiet happily on the floor chewing your favourite bone when in comes mum wearing the most fearsome expression you have ever seen. The next thing you know is you are being picked up by the scruff of your neck, dragged across the floor, and then your face pressed into a pool of wee or pooh on the carpet whilst your usually happy and smiling human has turned into a screaming banshee. Terrible isn't it when you look at it from this angle? Unfortunately there are still far too many people around offering this type of advice.

No puppy on earth has ever toilet trained because their owners used such methods. If the puppy did eventually toilet train, it did it despite the owners - NOT because of them. The vast majority of dogs are very clean and do not like to go in their living quarters unless they can really help it. Therefore most dogs toilet train because they were going to do so anyway, of their own accord, and not because of some human intervention. What puppies learn from such negative experiences is to be wary of unpredictable humans, especially if there is wee or pooh on the floor. Some will even learn to slink off to another part of the house where they hope no one will discover what they have done. I promise you your puppy will not make the association that you are angry because of what it did some five or ten minutes ago!

So, in very plain and simple terms, what puppies learn from such experiences are that wee or pooh on the floor plus you equals very bad news, and NOT that it should go outside next time to avoid your anger.

### **Effective House Training**

Now that you have a clearer understanding of what can (and often does) go wrong when using toilet training methods based upon common assumptions, let's look at more up to date methods which are proven to be far more effective in speeding up the natural processes:

Note the times your puppy needs to go, e.g. first thing in the morning. Most puppies need to wee as soon as they wake up. So before you greet the puppy, open the door and place it outside. As soon as it wees, praise and reward it for going in the correct place. After breakfast most puppies like to have another wee and perhaps to do their pooh. Once more place the pup outside and as soon as it goes, praise and reward profusely.

Watch for other times throughout the day, e.g. after a morning or afternoon nap. As soon as the puppy awakens, place it outside; after all meals - outside; interrupt play sessions - outside, that is before the excitement becomes too much that all control is lost! If you have visitors, or anything happens which the puppy finds exciting - place it outside. This way the puppy will quickly come to understand that outside is the right place to go. Watch the puppy as much as you can whilst it is out so that you can reward it immediately anything happens. This doesn't mean to say that you have to stand outside the whole time; I watched my puppies from the window and then ran outside to offer rewards.

If you catch your puppy about to wee or pooh in the house, then scream its name at the top of your voice so that it startles and then get yourselves outside as quickly as you can. It may take the puppy a few minutes to calm down after this shock, so keep an eye open, and when it eventually finishes what it had already started, praise it and re-establish your friendship. As previously stated, there is no point - absolutely no point whatsoever, in scolding the puppy after it has had an accident. Most puppies have accidents from time to time, even those who appear to be learning very quickly, so please don't be surprised and panic when it happens. The muscles which control such activities are not fully developed for sometime to come - perhaps as long as eight months in some cases, so please be patient.

## **Cleaning Away The Accidents**

The cleaning materials you use to clear up accidents are also very important. Any cleaning agent that contains ammonia or bleach (e.g. 1001 or Ajax) or standard disinfectants will not remove the smell of uric acid. In fact it will add to it. This will attract the puppy back to the same spot, as the smell of uric acid stimulates a dog to wee. This is why if you are in a vet's waiting room, or attending an indoor training session, you will find that if one dog wees, everyone else wants to mark the same spot. Therefore I suggest using cleaning materials that contain odour eliminators. Such products may be purchased from veterinary surgeries or from all good pet shops. A good cheap alternative is biological soap powder and white wine vinegar. In fact for very ingrained smells, using a combination of all of these products can bring great benefits. Also the door-to-door catalogues: Betterware and Kleeneze sell pet accident sprays, which have been highly recommended.

## **Problems**

Despite the above advice, some problems can still occur: Some nervous puppies, or those who are slightly under-confident often find it difficult to relax enough to toilet outside. If you are finding this, then keep on with the above advice - but make sure that you are taking all possible steps to socialize your puppy to the outside world. You cannot over-socialize a dog, but you can under socialize, so please do get your dog out and about into as many situations as you can, and try not to fuss or become anxious yourselves when the puppy shows any sign of fear. The puppy likes to see your confidence, so the best advice I can offer is to stay calm and adopt the attitude "I'm not scared so don't you bother yourself either". If the puppy appears to become too distressed then calmly walk away from the distressing situation and perhaps return to it at some other time. Some very fearful dogs may need additional support to help build their confidence. Please contact me for further advice.

## **Anxiety Problems**

Family arguments, conflicts, anxieties, a new baby, bereavements, fireworks, thunder, electric drills, noises from neighbouring houses (I have even met some dogs who became anxious about wind blowing across chimney tops and rattling letter boxes) are all possible triggers for inappropriate urinating. If you are experiencing anything along these lines, please telephone me for confidential advice. Or speak to someone else who is a qualified behaviour specialist, (qualified means at least a B. Sc.degree, and preferably a member of the UK Registry of Canine Behaviourists or the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors). Most dog trainers, veterinary surgeons or veterinary nurses who have an interest in behaviour are NOT qualified specialists and their advice may only be partially effective.

## **Medical Conditions**

Health problems can also result in inappropriate toileting. There are many medical conditions that can create such problems. Many of these can be treated very quickly, but some may need further investigation. If you are in any doubt whatsoever, please seek advice from a veterinary surgeon.

With this, I think I have covered most aspects of toilet training but if you are discovering anything that you are uncertain about please let me know.