

ASK THE TRAINER

Dear Marlo:

I am having trouble house training my new pup. Everyone is offering advice, including scolding and showing him his "mistake." I've tried this, but it's not working, and he seems afraid of me now. What do you suggest?



Congratulations on your new addition.

I would discourage scolding your puppy for having an accident. This

may cause him to become fearful of eliminating in front of you altogether, which is a counterproductive strategy. You want your puppy to go in front of you, especially when he's outside. Don't show him the mistake. Should you see him having an accident, a gentle "oops" will sufficiently interrupt it. Then take him outside to finish. Focus on what you can reward, not punish. Accidents happen. It's all about setting your puppy up for success.

First, you'll want to rule out any parasites or infections, so a vet check is crucial.

A crate is a valuable tool in the house-training program. Your puppy is less likely to eliminate in the crate, helping him to build up his bladder control. The crate should be big enough for him to stand up, turn around and lie down comfortably.

The rule of thumb is "months = hours." If your puppy is 2 months old, crating for 2 hours is a reasonable amount of time. Give your puppy an opportunity to eliminate before and after crating. A tether and/or a puppy playpen are also helpful. Tethering or umbilical cording is a technique whereby the leash attaches your puppy to you.



Feed your puppy meals, rather than leaving food out at all times. Keep the food down for 30 minutes and then remove it. Puppies tend to eliminate within an hour of eating. Take him out often after he has eaten. Do not offer food or water a couple hours before bedtime to help prevent overnight accidents. If he cries throughout the night, take him out to his elimination area to offer relief and then right back into the crate.

Having a routine is beneficial. Take him out to eliminate after sleeping, after eating, after playing, and before and after crating. Look for the telltale signs that he has to eliminate, such as creating distance from you, getting up and walking away from playing, sniffing the ground, circling and orienting towards the door.

Accompany him outside so you can see that he's eliminated. Have him on a leash to prevent him from running around. You can reward him with a walk or some outdoor play once he's done his business. Be silent, as talking can be distracting, and avoid pre-praising, as that can stop them in the middle. Once he's eliminated in the appropriate spot, then you can give him a treat or a piece of kibble. The treat needs to be given within a couple of seconds of elimination for your puppy to make the connection that 'whoohoo, peeing equals treat.'

Complete supervision is the most important part of a successful house-training program. This means watching your puppy 100% of the time. Otherwise put him in his crate or a puppy playpen.

Keep a journal of times of elimination—what, where and when he went. This can help you figure out your puppy's pattern.

When accidents happen, and they will, use a good enzyme cleaner to clean them up. I like Natures Miracle.

Eventually your puppy will start orienting towards the door or bark at it. At that time you can introduce a signal like "do you have to go potty?"

So when can you give him some unsupervised freedom? When he has been "accident free" for 30 days and is also giving you a signal that he needs to go out, like barking at the door.

Don't let anyone tell you that your puppy "should be" house-trained by a certain age. Some take longer than others to "get with the program."

Accidents always seem to happen in that split second when we answer the phone or open the fridge. That's why supervision is the key, along with a confinement area, having a routine and positive reinforcement.

Marlo Hiltz, CPDT-KA