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HOUSEBREAKING YOUR PET

Whether you are bringing home a new puppy or kitten or adopting an older dog, you will have to teach them where and when you want them to go to the bathroom. Housebreaking isn't always easy and accidents will happen, but the tips below will make the process go a little smoother for both you and your pet.

PUPPIES:

Housetraining a puppy requires time, vigilance, patience and commitment. By following the procedures outlined below, you can minimize house soiling incidents, but virtually every puppy will have an accident in the house (more likely several). This is part of raising a puppy and should be expected. The more consistent you are in following the basic housetraining procedures, the faster your puppy will learn acceptable behavior. It may take several weeks to housetrain your puppy and with some of the smaller breeds it might take longer. A puppy can usually be considered reliably housetrained when it has not had any accidents for two to three months.

Establish a Routine

Your puppy will do best if he is taken outside on a consistent and frequent schedule. He should have the opportunity to eliminate after waking up from a nap, after playing and after eating.

Choose a location not too far from the door to be the bathroom spot. Always take your puppy, on a leash, directly to the bathroom spot. Taking him for a walk or playing with him directly after he has eliminated will help him to associate good things with elimination. If you clean up an accident in the house, take the soiled rags or paper towels and leave them in the bathroom spot. The smell will help your puppy recognize the area as the place he is supposed to eliminate. While your puppy is eliminating, use a word or phrase, like "go potty," that you can eventually use before he eliminates to remind him of what he's supposed to be doing.

Praise your puppy lavishly every time he eliminates outdoors. You can even give him a treat. You must praise him or treat him immediately after he's finished eliminating, not after he comes back inside the house. This step is vital; because rewarding your dog for eliminating outdoors is the only way he'll know that this is an appropriate behavior.

If possible, put your puppy on a regular feeding schedule. Depending on their age, puppies usually need to be fed three or four times a day. Feeding your puppy at the same times each day will make it more likely that he'll eliminate at consistent times as well. This makes housetraining easier for both of you.

Supervise, Supervise, Supervise

Don't give your puppy an opportunity to soil in the house. He should be watched at all times when he is indoors. You can tether him to you with a leash or use baby gates to keep him in your view. Watch for signs that he needs to eliminate, like sniffing around or circling. When

you see these signs, immediately take him outside, on a leash, to his bathroom spot. If he eliminates, praise him lavishly and reward him with a treat.

Confinement

When you're unable to watch your puppy closely, he should be confined to an area small enough that he won't want to eliminate there. It should be just big enough for him to comfortably stand, lie down and turn around. This area could be a portion of a bathroom or laundry room, blocked off with boxes or baby gates. Or you may want to crate train your puppy and use the crate to confine him. If your puppy has spent several hours in confinement, make sure to take him directly to his bathroom spot before doing anything else.

Oops!

Expect your puppy to have an accident in the house – it's a normal part of housetraining.

When you catch him in the act of eliminating in the house, do something to interrupt him, like make a startling noise (be careful not to scare him). Immediately take him to his bathroom spot, praise him and give him a treat if he finishes eliminating there. Don't punish your puppy for eliminating in the house. If you find a soiled area, it's too late to administer a correction. Do nothing but clean it up. Rubbing your puppy's nose in it, taking him to the spot and scolding him (or any other punishment or discipline) will only make him afraid of you or afraid to eliminate in your presence. Animals don't understand punishment after the fact, even if it's only seconds later. Punishment will do more harm than good.

Cleaning the soiled area is very important because puppies are highly motivated to continue soiling in areas that smell like urine or feces. It's extremely important that you use the supervision and confinement procedures outlined above to minimize the number of accidents. If you allow your puppy to eliminate frequently in the house, he'll get confused about where he's supposed to eliminate, which will prolong the housetraining process.

Paper Training

A puppy under 6 months of age cannot be expected to control his bladder for more than a few hours at a time. If you have to be away from home for more than four or five hours a day, this may not be the best time for you to get a puppy. If you're already committed to having a puppy and have to be away from home for long periods of time, you'll need to train your puppy to eliminate in a specific place indoors. Be aware, however, that doing so can prolong the process of teaching him to eliminate outdoors. Teaching your puppy to eliminate on newspaper may create a life-long surface preference, meaning that he may, even in adulthood, eliminate on any newspaper he finds lying around the house.

When your puppy must be left alone for long periods of time, confine him to an area with enough room for a sleeping space, a playing space and a separate place to eliminate. In the area designated as the elimination place, you can either use newspapers, a sod box or litter. To make a sod box, place sod in a container, like a child's small, plastic swimming pool. You can also find dog litter products at pet supply stores. If you clean up an accident in the house, take the soiled rags or paper towels, and put them in the designated elimination place. The smell will help your puppy recognize the area as the place where he is supposed to eliminate.

Other Types of House soiling Problems

If you've consistently followed the housetraining procedures and your puppy continues to eliminate in the house, there may be another reason for his behavior.

Medical Problems: House soiling can often be caused by physical problems, such as a urinary tract infection or a parasite infection. Check with your veterinarian to rule out any possibility of disease or illness.

Submissive/Excitement Urination: Some dogs, especially young ones, temporarily lose control of their bladders when they become excited or feel threatened. This usually occurs during greetings, intense play or when they're about to be punished.

Territorial Urine-Marking: Dogs sometimes deposit urine or feces, usually in small amounts, to scent-mark their territory. Both male and female dogs do this, and it most often occurs when they believe their territory has been invaded.

Separation Anxiety: Dogs that become anxious when they're left alone may house soil as a result. Usually, there are other symptoms, such as destructive behavior or vocalization

Fears or Phobias: When animals become frightened, they may lose control of their bladder and/or bowels. If your puppy is afraid of loud noises, such as thunderstorms or fireworks, he may house soil when he's exposed to these sounds

DOGS:

Many adult dogs adopted from animal shelters were housetrained in their previous homes. While at the shelter, however, they may not have gotten enough opportunities to eliminate outside, and consequently, they may have soiled their kennel areas. This tends to weaken their housetraining habits. Additionally, scents and odors from other pets in the new home may stimulate some initial urine marking. Remember that you and your new dog need some time to learn each other's signals and routines. Even if he was housetrained in his previous home, if you do not recognize his "bathroom" signal, you might miss his request to go out, causing him to eliminate indoors.

Therefore, for the first few weeks after you bring him home, you should assume your new dog is not housetrained and start from scratch, following the steps given above for housetraining a puppy. If he was housetrained in his previous home, the re-training process should progress quickly. The process will be much smoother if you take steps to prevent accidents and remind him where he is supposed to eliminate.

CATS:

Your New Cat and the Litter box

Most cats have a specific preference about where they want to eliminate. By following the suggestions below, you'll be able to start off on the right foot with your new cat.

Location

Most people are inclined to place the litter box in an out-of-the-way spot in order to minimize odor and loose particles of cat litter in the house. Often, the litter box ends up in the basement, sometimes next to an appliance and/or on a cold cement floor. This type of location can be undesirable from your cat's point of view for several reasons.

If you have a kitten or an older cat, she may not be able to get down a long flight of stairs in time to get to the litter box. Since she is new to the household, she may not remember where the litter box is if it's located in an area she seldom frequents. Your cat may be startled while using the litter box if a furnace, washer or dryer suddenly comes on and that may be the last time she'll risk such a frightening experience! If your cat likes to scratch the surface surrounding her litter box, she may find a cold cement floor unappealing.

Therefore, you may have to compromise. The litter box should be kept in a location that affords your cat some privacy, but is also conveniently located. If you place the litter box in a

closet or a bathroom, be sure the door is wedged open from both sides, in order to prevent her from being trapped in or out. Depending on where it's located, you might consider cutting a hole in a closet door and adding a swinging door. If the litter box sits on a smooth, slick or cold surface, put a small throw rug underneath the litter box.

Type of Litter

Research has shown that most cats prefer fine-grained litters, presumably because they have a softer feel. The new scoopable litters usually have finer grains than the typical clay litter. However, high-quality, dust-free, clay litters are relatively small-grained and may be perfectly acceptable to your cat. Potting soil also has a very soft texture, but is not very absorbent. If you suspect your cat has a history of spending time outdoors and is likely to eliminate in your houseplants, you can try mixing some potting soil with your regular litter. Pellet-type litters or those made from citrus peels are not recommended. Once you find a litter your cat likes, don't change types or brands. Buying the least expensive litter or whatever brand happens to be on sale, could result in your cat not using the litter box.

Many cats are put off by the odor of scented or deodorant litters. For the same reason, it's not a good idea to place a room deodorizer or air freshener near the litter box. A thin layer of baking soda placed on the bottom of the box will help absorb odors without repelling your cat. Odor shouldn't be a problem if the litter box is kept clean. If you find the litter box odor offensive, your cat probably finds it even more offensive and won't want to eliminate there.

Number of Litter boxes

You should have at least as many litter boxes as you have cats. That way, none of them will ever be prevented from eliminating in the litter box because it's already occupied. You might also consider placing them in several locations around the house, so that no one cat can "guard" the litter box area and prevent the other cats from accessing it. We also recommend that you place at least one litter box on each level of your house. It's not possible to designate a personal litter box for each cat in your household, as cats will use any litter box that's available. Occasionally, a cat may refuse to use the litter box after another cat has used it. In this case, all of the litter boxes will need to be kept extremely clean and additional boxes may be needed.

To Cover or Not To Cover

Some people prefer to use a covered litter box, however, there are some potential problems with using this type of box. You may want to experiment by offering both types at first, to discover what your cat prefers.

Potential Problems

You may forget to clean the litter box as frequently as you should because the dirty litter is "out of sight – out of mind."

A covered litter box traps odors inside, so it will need to be cleaned more often than an open one.

A covered litter box may not allow a large cat sufficient room to turn around, scratch, dig or position herself in the way she wants.

A covered litter box may also make it easier for another cat to lay in wait and "ambush" the user as she exits the box. On the other hand, a covered litter box may feel more private and may be preferred by timid cats.

Cleaning the Box

To meet the needs of the most discriminating cat, feces should be scooped out of the litter box daily. How often you change the litter depends on the number of cats you have, the number of litter boxes, and the type of litter you use. Twice a week is a general guideline for clay litter, but depending on the circumstances, you may need to change it every other day or once a week. If you scoop the litter daily, scoopable litter can go two to three weeks before the litter needs to be changed. If you notice an odor or if much of the litter is wet or clumped, it's time for a change. Don't use strong smelling chemicals or cleaning products when washing the litter box, as it may cause your cat to avoid it. Washing with soap and water should be sufficient.

Liners

Some cats don't mind having a liner in the litter box, while others do. Again, you may want to experiment to see if your cat is bothered by a liner in the box. If you do use a liner, make sure it's anchored in place, so it can't easily catch your cat's claws or be pulled out of place.

Depth of Litter

Some people think that the more litter they put in the box, the less often they will have to clean it. This is not true. Most cats won't use litter that's more than about two inches deep. In fact, some long-haired cats actually prefer less litter and a smooth, slick surface, such as the bottom of the litter box. The litter box needs to be cleaned on a regular basis and adding extra litter is not a way around that chore.

"Litter-Training" Cats

There's really no such thing as "litter-training" a cat in the same way one would house-train a dog. A cat doesn't need to be taught what to do with a litter box. The only thing you need to do is provide an acceptable, accessible litter box, using the suggestions above. It's not necessary to take your cat to the litter box and move her paws back and forth in the litter, in fact, we don't recommend it. This may actually be an unpleasant experience for your cat and is likely to initiate a negative association with the litter box.

If Problems Develop

If your cat begins to eliminate in areas other than the litter box, your first call should always be to your veterinarian. Many medical conditions can cause a change in a cat's litter box habits. If your veterinarian determines that your cat is healthy, the cause may be behavioral. Most litter box behavior problems can be resolved by using behavior modification techniques. Punishment is not the answer. For long-standing or complex situations, contact an animal behavior specialist who has experience working with cats.

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