



# House training 101

By Lisa Patrona, Dip. CBST, CPDT-KA, ACDBC

## **Dedication**

Each year, billions of dollars are spent by local governments to shelter and ultimately destroy millions of adoptable dogs (and cats) due to a shortage of homes.

This booklet is dedicated to those of you who made the conscious choice to be a part of the solution by rescuing your new dog. We also dedicate this booklet to all dog-loving people who choose to teach their dogs to successfully live in a human's world, using methods that are gentle and kind.

It is our hope that this booklet will help you to build a loving and secure relationship with your new friend; the kind that all dogs so richly deserve, but so few are fortunate enough to receive.

From the bottom of our hearts, and on behalf of all the shelter and rescued animals patiently awaiting their forever home - thank you.

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House training problems can make or break a relationship between dogs and their people. It can be a frustrating thing to deal with, and if you've rescued your new companion, it may very well be the reason that they lost their previous home. Things often times go so terribly wrong during this process that relationships are broken and harmed, beyond repair.

The information that follows is designed to help you successfully house train your pup (or older dog). It is our responsibility as dog guardians to be gentle and effective teachers, but without a proper understanding of their learning process, this is not possible. My hope is that this booklet will aid in your understanding - and through that understanding, you'll build a stronger bond with your canine companion as you house train him quickly and effectively.

For starters, let's look at the three things you need to help your pup (or older dog) learn in order for complete house training to occur:

1. **Where** you want him to go, e.g., outside in the yard
2. To associate the feeling of having to urinate, or defecate, with being in the place you've determined as the "right place" to go
3. Develop the physical ability to control both elimination behaviors - and ultimately learn to "hold it" - until he's in the right place to do so

**Note:** Most people consider the "right place" to be outside in the yard. However, the "right place" is anywhere you want your dog to routinely eliminate. For some (particularly those with toy/miniature size dogs), this could be a litter box or on wee pads.

Next, let's examine the two essential components you'll need to accomplish to house train your pup/dog successfully and completely:

**REINFORCEMENT** of wanted behavior

**\*AND\***

**PREVENTION** of undesired behavior

Let's look at each component individually.

**Reinforcement of wanted behavior:** Reinforcement for behavior serves to strengthen that behavior. Reinforced behavior will *\*always\** be repeated. When it comes to the behaviors of urinating and defecating, reinforcement occurs naturally during the act, in the form of immediate relief from that uncomfortable feeling of "having to go" -- just like it does for humans! Since elimination behaviors are reinforced immediately through the very act, where your pup/dog is when he eliminates becomes the most important part of this entire process.

**Prevention of undesired behavior:** Now that you understand that each time your dog goes potty anywhere other than the "right place," he's learning through reinforcement to eliminate there again, it should be clear that preventing elimination behaviors anywhere other than where you've determined to be the "right place" for your pup/dog is key.

**Use of a crate as prevention:** Generally speaking, dogs will not want to eliminate inside their crate (unless the crate is too large, has absorbent materials within, or he's been confined for too long and literally couldn't hold it). It's usually the best form of house soiling prevention. The size of the crate is very important, though. If you have a pup who is still growing, you should purchase a size that will suit him as an adult, preferably one that comes with divider panels so you can create the appropriate size for now, and move the panel to expand its size as he grows. He only needs enough room to stand up, turn around, and lay down comfortably. If it's too large, the pup or dog may eliminate in one area and then go to lay in another!

I don't recommend leaving towels, crate pads, or other absorbent materials in the crate--especially not with puppies. Urine soaks right into the material/s which will become a real problem to overcome later, as the pup quickly learns to continue to soil his crate. Another common problem associated with leaving absorbents in the crate is that some pups/dogs will push the materials aside, make their "deposit" then cover it up and go back to sleep in perfect comfort. Yikes! If you find that your dog or pup is eliminating on absorbents inside the crate, you must promptly and completely remove them for now, to prevent the behavior from continuing. \*\* visit our [\*\*Crate Training\*\*](#) tips section for more on this topic

**Active supervision and tethering:** You might choose to leash/tether your dog to you for prevention, instead of crating, which might be ok when you're home. While tethering may be an effective means to prevent house soiling under certain conditions, in most cases it's impractical and ineffective as the only means of prevention. A combination of crate confinement and tethering is usually the best approach.  
**(See the Plan of Action section below for more)**

**Small room as confinement:** Some people will choose a small room as prevention which is ok as long as the dog does not eliminate in the area. If, however, you find that the dog is eliminating in this area, you'll need to choose a more effective means of prevention (crate confinement) so that the problem does not grow.

**Confinement period:** Proper confinement provides a way for the pup/dog to learn to "hold it" until you've gotten them to the right place to eliminate. The confinement period rule for pups five months and under is the number of months of age + 1. So, if you have a four-month-old pup, he should be able to "hold it" for up to five hours in proper confinement. This does not mean that your pup won't eliminate sooner if given the opportunity! Dogs older than this may have developed more than say a three- or four-month-old pup, but it's just as important to be careful with them, and sure that s/he's taken out for elimination after a reasonable length of confinement time.

If your schedule finds you needing to leave your pup or dog for longer-than-appropriate periods of time, ask a friend, neighbor or family member to come and let him out to eliminate half way through the day. DayCare is also a helpful option. Requiring pups (or dogs of any age) to hold it for longer than is appropriate can lead to urinary tract infections and other medical problems.

### **Plan of Action:**

**1. Scheduled feedings:** Intake of food must be scheduled and monitored. Feed all meals at regularly scheduled times, i.e., AM, noon and PM for pups -- (follow your veterinarian's suggestion for number of meals to give your puppy each day) -- or just AM/PM for older dogs. This is very important! If your dog is eating at regular times, she will also eliminate at fairly regular times too, which gives you a better understanding of when she's likely to have to defecate.

**2. Scheduled/monitored water intake:** Do not leave water out for your pup/dog to drink freely! This is tough for lots of people, but it is critical in the house training process when it comes to urination. Water may be offered as many times per day as you think your dog needs...the point here is to know when the dog drinks so that you can be ready to get him/her outside soon to eliminate.

- For pups, the need to eliminate may happen as soon as 15 minutes after water intake. Other times to get him out to eliminate are:
- Upon waking
- Immediately upon release from proper confinement
- During activity/exercise. Activity gets things moving, so if your pup is active in the house, be sure to get him to the right place often to prevent an accident!

For older dogs (and this really depends on the dog, so observe him to determine what is appropriate) he may need to urinate 20-30 minutes after water intake, but it's better to be safe than sorry. Having the dog in the right place to eliminate often will aid in success, and prevent accidents!

**Note about water intake:** It is not advisable during the house training process to give your pup or dog water too close to bedtime - or too close to when you're leaving him for a lengthy period of time, during which he'll be confined. Water before confinement can and should be given early enough beforehand to allow him time to eliminate before being placed in proper confinement.

**3. Designate a specific elimination area:** Take your pup/dog to the same place each time. A scent post will build in this area and further signal him to evacuate there again and again. This is also helpful for us humans when it comes to clean up time!

**4. Keep a record of both forms of intake and elimination activities.** Once you see a pattern – and you will - you can better estimate when your dog needs you to get him to the “right place” to eliminate! Click [here](#) to download and print an intake/elimination log

**5. The 3-5 minute rule:** Only stay outside with your pup/dog in the elimination spot for 3-5 minutes during each attempt. You really need your pup/dog to learn to associate the “feeling of having to go” with being in the right place to do it! If he eliminates right away, great! As soon as he’s finished, pull a surprise treat from your pocket and reward him immediately. If, based on your intake/elimination log, your pup/dog does not eliminate within the 3-5 minute time frame, you should understand that your pup or dog is an accident waiting to happen! Bring him back inside and into his proper confinement area/crate for 10-15 minutes and then take him back out for another try.

With each attempt, the sensation of “having to go” is building within your pup/dog and you are actively preventing him from relieving himself in an inappropriate place, and setting him up to succeed at eliminating in the right place! You may choose to tether pup/dog to you instead - which is fine as long as you are actively supervising for that 10-15 minutes until you take him out for another attempt. Watch for “potty prep” behaviors like sniffing, circling or squatting. If see any “potty prep” behaviors, interrupt gently and get the pup outside to the right place to eliminate. Once he goes, deliver a surprise treat from you pocket once he’s finished, and then enjoy some play time together!

### **Common Myths:**

**Myth: “My dog knows that he shouldn’t potty in the house because he looks guilty when I scold him.”**

**Fact:** Believing this will really jeopardize your progress, not to mention the damaging effects it could have on your relationship with him because you believe that somehow he’s doing this on purpose to upset you.

Fearful body language like cowering or, as we humans like to call it, “looking guilty” has nothing to do with the dog “knowing that he’s done something wrong.” Such body language only communicate one thing; that your behavior is frightening to your dog. Continuing to scold him will not improve the house training problem, it’ll make it worse, and other fear-based behavior problems may develop.

**Myth: “Taking my dog to the mess and rubbing his nose in it while yelling at him will teach him not to go potty in the house.” AND “If rubbing his nose in it doesn’t work, then taking him over to it and spanking him will.”**

**Fact:** I think that both of these common mistakes in thinking can be addressed at the same time. For starters, taking him "over to the mess" implies that the mess is already there....which means that he eliminated there at some point earlier. It's way too late to do anything about it and trying to do so really constitutes abuse, since there is no way for your dog to understand why you're acting the way you are toward him, much less what on Earth you're so upset about.

Believing either of these serious misconceptions, is one of the best ways to train your dog to be afraid of you. And you'll still have a dog who is eliminating in the house.

**Myth: “Discipline (spanking or screaming at him) when I catch him in the act first, then putting him outside will teach him not to go in the house.”**

**Fact:** One thing’s for sure, this approach will teach your dog that it’s definitely not a good idea to eliminate when you’re anywhere nearby. By delivering such an intensely frightening experience while she was in the act of eliminating (no matter where it happened to be occurring), you’ll teach her something valuable indeed--*that eliminating in your presence is not something she should do -- ever again*. So, thanks to this approach, she’s learned that when she feels the need to eliminate, it’s safest for her to either wait until you’re not around, or even more likely, to sneak off to a “safe” place free of you (or humans in general), like a basement or another unoccupied room to do her business where nothing scary can happen as she relieves herself.

This approach will do nothing to help her understand where you’d prefer her to eliminate -- it’ll only teach her to hide or “sneak off” when she needs to pee or poo -- and it’s almost guaranteed to create other serious fear-based behavior problems.

**Myth: “I can’t get her to just go potty outside, because she is spiteful and stubborn.”**

**Fact:** When words like “spiteful” and “stubborn” are used to describe a dog’s behavior, the translation must be - not trained properly, or effectively. There is no mystery here and nothing more or less to be discovered.

**Myth: “Do not clean up the “accident” in front of the dog because they are getting your attention, which rewards the behavior of going in the house. They also see this as your “approval” to continue eliminating in the house.”**

**Fact:** Ok, now let’s think about this one. What does cleaning up pee or poop have to do with giving your dog attention? Dogs have no moral code when it comes to their behaviors...they simply repeat the ones that have been reinforced in the past. Cleaning up a potty mess in no way reinforces the behavior of going potty (in the house or anywhere else!) and I can assure you that doing so won’t have any impact on your dogs’ elimination habits! Thoroughly clean any mess with a good enzymatic cleaner, and remember, it’s your responsibility to do a better job supervising and preventing accidents.

**Myth: “My dog just refuses to “tell me” when he has to go out.”**

**Fact:** Many people view this as a problem. It isn’t really a problem at all if you remember that house training is the sole responsibility of the human. Blaming a dog’s incomplete house training behavior on his not “telling” you when he has to go outside is a good way to set your dog and yourself up for a big failure -and he still won’t be house trained.

Once you have done your part and you've consistently trained your dog where you *want* him to eliminate (presumably outside), and prevented him from eliminating anywhere else, he will begin to act in ways that signal his need for you to let him outside to relieve himself. Some signs may include just hanging around you more, going to the area near the exit point to the yard, whining, and/or pacing.

As your dog's ability to "hold it" improves, and the connection solidifies between feeling the need to eliminate and needing to get outside to do it, he will also begin to learn to "hold it" for longer periods.

**Warning:** Unless your dog is already fully house trained, we do not suggest training him to ring a bell on the door as a "signal" for you to let him out to potty. Let's say that the dog has rung the bell and no one hears it? He rings again and no one comes. Now he has an "accident" by the door. He's surely learning that ringing the bell to be let out isn't very reliable, but more importantly, the habit of eliminating right by the door has just begun. Also, unless the dog was trained to ring the bell to be let outside as he/she was experiencing the feeling of needing to eliminate, (reinforced by your letting him out and the subsequent relief from eliminating) then he will not associate ringing the bell with getting outside specifically to eliminate! Many who have used this approach learned the hard way -- that all they've really done is trained him to ring the bell to get outside...to chase the squirrels, bark at the neighbors, etc. - and he's still not house trained!

**Myth: "I have a small dog and she just can't be house trained. Books I've read and people I have talked to say that I will not be able to house train her because she is small."**

**Fact:** Small dogs are just as capable of becoming house trained as their larger counterparts. The principles of learning apply to a Maltese or Toy Poodle the same way that they apply to a Great Dane! A common reason that small/toy dog people report problems is that their small dog "doesn't like to go out when it's cold or raining." It is understandable that we don't want our dogs to be uncomfortable, so here are some suggestions that can help:

1. Buy a doggy coat for extra comfort when it's chilly out.
2. Build a small sheltered area right outside the door and train your pup to use it
3. If there's snow outside, shovel an area right outside the door to make it easier for him/her to do her business as comfortably and quickly as possible.
4. Install proper behavior early on, so that the dog will very quickly do her job so that she can come right back into the warm, dry house!

### **Special cases and possible medical causes for problem elimination:**

Not all eliminative behaviors are the result of a "house training" problem. These conditions present unique challenges that require a specialized approach to overcome. If you think your dog has one of the following conditions, help from a qualified behavior professional and your veterinarian may be necessary.

**Submissive urination:** This behavior is often times displayed during greetings, or as you approach. The dog will cower and lower their head while squatting to void. This is more common in young dogs - but older dogs, especially cocker spaniels, will sometimes exhibit this behavior through adulthood.

Most times, this will require that you modify the way you greet your dog/pup. For example, ignoring him/her for the first several minutes can often be helpful. Using any type of punishment for this behavior is completely inappropriate, and will only make the behavior much worse.

NOTE: If you've been using a harsh approach with your pup/dog for handling any training challenge (including house training challenges) it may very well be the cause for this behavior. See the Common Myths section above, for more on this.

**Excitement urination:** Some dogs (especially, young dogs, but older dogs do this sometimes too) just get so darn happy to see you, or people in general, that they can't help but "tinkle" a bit when someone comes to say "hi"! Modifying the humans approach during greeting, in addition to training a solid behavior such as a "sit for greeting" can be very effective for modifying this behavior.

**Urine "marking":** "Urine marking" is a behavior most commonly seen in adult non-neutered male dogs. It's very common for people to mistakenly assume "marking" as the culprit (especially in puppies!) when actually incomplete house training, or in some cases a medical problem, is the real culprit.

There are many causes and environmental events that may trigger "marking" behavior which is characterized by the dog lifting his leg and depositing small amounts of urine on vertical surfaces, i.e., table/chair legs, the side of the couch, and/or "new" objects in the home, among others\* If your dog is adult, male, and intact, see your veterinarian first to rule out medical causes and discuss neutering as the first step.

This behavior (like any other) is strengthened through repetition and practice. If it's determined that your dog really is "urine marking", neutering **and** management/training will be important. Please let us know if you're concerned about what you think may be "urine marking" - we'll help determine if that's really what you're dealing with, or not.

**Separation Anxiety:** This behavior can be common in "rescued" dogs, and requires a behavior professional's help to work through. In itself though, a dog who eliminates in the house while you're not home does not mean he suffers from this condition. A thorough assessment conducted by a qualified behavior professional is the first step.

### **Possible medical causes for house training problems:**

**Bladder or urinary tract infection (UTI):** Most commonly, the symptoms are that the amount of urine voided is very small, and "accidents" are happening much more frequently than usual. You may also see the dog squatting and "trying to go" but very

little or no urine is produced. Dogs of any age or gender are susceptible, and there are several different causes for urinary tract infections. Start with an appointment with your veterinarian if your pup/dog exhibits any of these symptoms.

**Other medical problems:** If your dog is already house trained, but has suddenly started to have accidents, schedule a visit for your dog with your veterinarian right away. There are many medical conditions, some very serious, that can cause this kind of problem.

**Canine Cognitive Dysfunction:** This condition is similar to Alzheimer's in humans. It occurs in geriatric dogs, usually over ten years of age (although some exceptions to this are possible). These poor doggies begin forgetting things, including their house training! Other symptoms may include increased vocalization and changes in sleep-wake patterns. If you have an older dog who seems to be forgetting his training, or is otherwise acting disoriented or confused, please call your veterinarian for an appointment immediately. Canine Cognitive Dysfunction is treated with medication that will be prescribed once your veterinarian has diagnosed the condition.

We hope that you have found this guide helpful. If you have done your part and followed this advice but feel you need more help, please contact us. Trainers Academy has a qualified and knowledgeable staff available and eager to help.

Be sure visit our entire section of house training tips and articles here:  
[http://www.woofology.com/housetraining\\_tips.html](http://www.woofology.com/housetraining_tips.html)

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President  
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Lisa recognized her affinity for animals, especially dogs, as a very young girl. Once she was old enough, she began volunteering at an animal shelter. The very sad and often hopeless environment led her to decide that keeping dogs in their homes, and ultimately out of shelters would become her life's work. She strongly believed that most were in such places because they were misunderstood and never properly trained.

In October of 2005, Lisa became the owner and President of Trainers Academy, LLC - 6 years after joining Trainers Obedience Centers' staff. During her career she has worn many hats, including General Manager, Director of Behavioral Sciences, Class Instructor and Behavioral Consultant.

Lisa graduated from the Companion Animal Sciences Institute in 2006 with honors, and holds a Diploma of Canine Behavior, Science and Technology (formerly known as Diploma of Dog Training and Behavior Consulting). University level studies included developmental psychology, learning theory, training processes, canine social behavior, behavior modification, and professional ethics.

James O'Heare, CABC, President of Companion Animal Sciences Institute said this about Lisa. "Lisa completed her studies passing with Distinction, the highest level of recognition we offer for exceptionally excellent work. Lisa's work demonstrates that she is highly knowledgeable in all areas of dog behavior, training and behavior consulting. The course work she completed was advanced, in-depth, and at the university level, requiring both academic and hands-on demonstration of her knowledge and skills. Lisa has also been an extremely helpful presence in class, participating in discussions and helping less knowledgeable students understand the topics under review. She has been so helpful in fact that we have asked Lisa to remain in class with us after graduation in order to contribute to future discussions for the benefit of our students."

She earned the title of Certified Professional Dog Trainer - Knowledge Assessed (CPDT-KA), through the Association of Pet Dog Trainers in 2002, joining the ranks of less than 500 others to become one of the first in history to earn the certification in the United States and Canada.

Lisa is a Certified Member of the Association of Animal Behavior Professionals (AABP), an Associate Certified Dog Behavior Consultant with the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants (IAABC), a Professional Member of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT), a Platinum Member of the International Association of Force Free Pet Professionals (IAFPP), a Full Member of the Pet Professional Guild, and a member of Truly Dog Friendly.

She has written the curriculum for the schools' educational programs, and training articles that have been published on national websites. Her work was also published in the book the APDT's Top Tips from Top Trainers, released in February 2010. She was featured in a front-page article in the Daily Tribune for her work with rescued dogs, and has also appeared in the Detroit News and Free Press, and on Detroit Public Television. In 2010 Lisa was nominated for, and honored with an award for Behavioral Therapy Excellence by the International Positive Dog Trainers Association.

In 2011, Lisa led her school to becoming the first facility in the world honored with personal acceptance by Victoria Stilwell to join her growing network of training professionals licensed by Victoria Stilwell Positively Dog Training, LLC.

Lisa's family consists of her husband Tristan, stepdaughter Ella, and their furry kids, BuBu, Simon, Maddie, Laney, Jolie, Dishie and Bradley. She misses her other fur kids, Jeffrey, Calvin and Ben, who have crossed the Rainbow Bridge.