

CANINE HOUSE SOILING

Dr. Don McKeown, Dr. Andrew Luescher, and Dr. Mary Machum - Copyright

Elimination problems represent 10-20% of all behavior problems in dogs. House-soiling may be caused by one, or a combination, of the following:

- ineffective house-training methods
- territorial marking
- separation anxiety
- fear, excitement, or supersubmission
- too much food, an inappropriate diet, or compulsive eating and drinking
- diseases like urinary tract infection, incontinence, and gastroenteritis
- early experience - puppies kept in a cage until 3-5 months of age and not allowed to defecate outside are difficult or impossible to house train
- attention-getting behavior in older dogs

When dealing with house-soiling, it is essential to establish a proper location for the dog to eliminate, and to **totally prevent the dog from using any unwanted location**. This means that you will have to keep the dog under close surveillance and observe his behavior, so that he has no opportunity to eliminate in any location other than the one you have chosen for him.

Before training, you must ensure that the dog has no disease (a common cause of urination in the house in older, previously well-trained dogs), that the dog has normal stools, and that the dog is not over-eating (which may cause soft stool). Dogs with soft stool or diarrhea cannot be house trained until their bowel movements are firm.

Puppies can be house-trained at a very young age. The length of time, in hours, that they have control is equal to their age in months + 1. For example, a 2 month old pup has control for 3 hours. Most normal dogs can be house-trained as adults.

TREATMENT OF HOUSE SOILING

1. PREVENT ALL URINATION & DEFECATION IN THE HOUSE

The dog must not be allowed loose in the house unless it is directly supervised. The dog may start to circle, sniff the ground, or simply appear restless before he eliminates. You should expect the dog to eliminate after resting or napping, 10 minutes after eating, after exercise or play, and when he smells a previously soiled area. You will have to be especially vigilant at these times. If the dog has an opportunity to mess in the house, you have not been supervising him carefully enough.

When you are not directly observing the dog, he should be confined in a small space. A cage is ideal for this, because it becomes the dog's den and therefore provides a sense of privacy, comfort, and security. Purchase a cage for your puppy that is large enough to accommodate the dog when it is fully grown. One should then block off the cage so that the puppy can just lie down and turn around. It is important that the puppy cannot urinate or defecate in one end of the cage and sleep in the other. A very large dog may be confined in a small bathroom. Confine the dog if you are talking on the phone, answer

the door, or any other time when your attention may be distracted from the dog. The dog can be kept in the cage all night, and for a maximum of 4 hours during the day while he is being house trained. Do NOT use confinement as punishment. While house-training, do not give the dog food or water while confined.

2. REWARD THE DOG FOR ELIMINATING IN THE PROPER LOCATION

This means that you will have to take the dog outside, on a leash, to a convenient location whenever he needs to eliminate. Place a small piece of stool in the selected area, as the smell will stimulate elimination. Praise the dog lavishly, within 1/2 second, of the urination or defecation. If you think he needs to eliminate and he doesn't, watch him very carefully in the house or confine him for 15 minutes and try again.

3. TAKE OUT AFTER EATING, DRINKING, AND EXERCISE

Take the dog out first thing in the morning and last thing at night. Feed the dog 2 or 3 times a day, and take him out 10 minutes after eating. If your dog is used to being fed free-choice, you should start giving him meals so that you know when to expect him to eliminate.

4. PUNISHMENT

DO NOT punish the dog for house-soiling, but ignore the mistake, and then take the dog outside and praise him for eliminating in the proper location. Any type of punishment (rubbing the dog's nose in it, hitting with a newspaper, etc) will not work.

PUNISHMENT WOULD HAVE TO BE ADMINISTERED WITHIN 1/2 SECOND OF THE EVENT TO BE EFFECTIVE. This is rarely, if ever possible. Dogs that look "guilty" have learned that when you are present, and a mess exists, they are in trouble. They do not associate urinating or defecating with being punished for it at a later time. They also cannot reason that if they don't make a mess in the future, they won't be punished. If someone who had never scolded your dog went into your home, and a mess was present, the dog would not look guilty. The "guilty" look only occurs when you and the mess are present.

5. TREAT THE SOILED AREAS

Regardless of how thoroughly you clean, the dog, with his superb sense of smell, will still be able to smell where an elimination occurred. This odor can stimulate further eliminations at specific previously soiled areas. You must therefore mask the odor after the area has been cleaned. If the soiled area is on a hard surface, wash it with a solution of 1 part dettol mixed in 4 parts water or apply a few drops of oil of citronella (1/4 teaspoon/spot). These treatments must be repeated every 4 days for a month.

If the dog has soiled on carpet, clean the area and then rub a small quantity (1/4 to 1/2 teaspoonful) of mothball crystals deep into the pile of the carpet. You should not be able to smell mothballs when you walk into the room, but the dog will because his sense of smell is so acute. Reapply the mothball crystals every 5-7 days for a month. Do not clean with vinegar or ammonia, which smell like urine to the dog.

Using this technique, house-soiling problems are normally quickly solved. To be effective, however, all phases of the program must be followed simultaneously and consistently. We are here to help you in whatever way we can, so please call if you have any problems or questions.