

Patty's Pups

How to Housebreak a Puppy

To best accomplish the goal, do not consider house breaking as “training”. Instead consider it as proper “management”. With training, we do something to the dog to teach it a new behavior, such as making it lie down when we say “down”. With management, we manage the puppy’s environment or the method in which we handle the dog to achieve the desired response, such as confining a puppy to a crate or removing dangerous objects from his reach. Housebreaking falls into the management category.

Just like infant children, little puppies (8-12 weeks old) truly do not have a conscious sense of when they are about to eliminate. For that reason, you cannot tell them that they were “wrong” when they make a mistake in the house, they just won’t understand it. Anything you say or do to the puppy will not be associated with the elimination mistake, since they do not know what they just did. So, any sort of “house breaking” punishment is interpreted by the puppy as nonsensical anger from their human. In his mind, you will become an unpredictable and angry person and someone to avoid or fear.

In order to start housebreaking, right off the bat, we want to create a habit for the puppy where he learns, through experience, where he is to eliminate. Once the puppy has developed the habit of eliminating specifically outdoors (and indoor elimination is prevented through proper management), as he begins to recognize when he is about to eliminate, he will choose to go to the place where you have chosen based on highly consistent management.

Here’s how to best house break a puppy:

- Always manage the puppy in a crate that is small enough that he cannot eliminate in one end and sleep comfortably in the other end.
- When the puppy wakes, open the crate door, let him walk out, then take him in your arms and carry him outside. Do not let him walk to the door or he will probably wee before he gets there.
- Put him down in the spot where you hope he will choose to eliminate.
- Wait patiently with him, either standing still or walking about. Do not speak to him or engage him in any play, or he will be distracted from the task at hand.

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- When he eliminates, praise him profusely. Then, wait for him to do “number two” (by walking about or standing still quietly). When he does his business, praise him profusely, again.
- Now, you can play with him outdoors for a while or take him indoors.
- Once inside, you must supervise him 100%. Confine him to the room in which you are by using baby gates or by closing doors. Allow him access to water. Interact with him or let him relax and chew on a toy. Then, after 20-50 minutes, put him back in his crate to nap.
- If it is time for a meal, give him his meal in his crate.
- After 20-40 minutes, remove the meal and take him outdoors again. Most very young puppies need to eliminate from 20-40 minutes after they eat. Repeat the steps for outdoor supervision and praising. Do not bring him indoors until he has done his duty.
- Once inside, you can put him directly in his crate for 2-4 hours, depending on his age.
- A 12-week-old puppy should be able to remain crated for 4-5 hours.
- A six-month-old puppy should be able to remain crated for 6-7 hours.
- A ten-month-old puppy should be able to remain crated for 8 hours.

A typical day for an **8-week-old puppy** would go something like this;

- 6:00 AM puppy wakes. Take him outdoors immediately. Wait for him to eliminate and praise.
- 6:15 AM indoor, 100% supervised play time and access to water.
- 6:45 AM put puppy back in crate with his breakfast meal.
- 7:00 AM take puppy outdoors (remove food). Wait for him to eliminate and praise.
- 7:20 AM put puppy back in crate, leave for work.
- 12:00 PM take puppy outdoors. Wait for him to eliminate and praise.
- 12:15 indoor, 100% supervised play time and access to water.
- 12:30 PM pup puppy in crate with lunch meal.
- 12:45 PM take puppy outdoors (remove food). Wait for him to eliminate and praise.
- 1:00 PM put puppy back in crate, back to work.
- 5:30 PM take puppy outdoors. Wait for him to eliminate and praise.
- 5:45 PM play with puppy outdoors.
- 6:00 PM indoor, 100% supervised play time and access to water.
- 6:30 PM, put puppy in crate and tend to your required evening tasks.
- 7:30 PM, take puppy outdoors. Wait for him to eliminate and praise.
- 7:45 PM, indoor 100% supervised play time. Access to water.
- 8:30 PM, in crate with evening meal.

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- 9:00 PM, take puppy outdoors (remove food). Wait for him to eliminate and praise.
- 9:15 PM, indoor 100% supervised play time.
- 10:00 PM, last trip outdoors.
- 10:15 PM put puppy in crate for the evening.

This describes the requirements for an eight- to ten-week-old puppy. With each passing week, he should be able to handle longer periods of time before going outdoors. However, if you do not make the commitment to house break him in the first four weeks, bad habits can develop which could be very difficult to resolve. So, I strongly recommend creating a method of managing the puppy for the first month that allows for mid-day outings for potty breaks.

At least for the first several months, I recommend putting the puppy crate in your bedroom. That way, if he wakes in the middle of the night, you can say to him, "It's OK, we are right here, go back to sleep". If that works, he will go back to sleep within a few minutes. If he continues to fuss, you should take him outside right away, and then put him directly back in his crate when you get back indoors. A puppy just wants to sleep within "snoring range" of his human pack-mates. If left alone in the garage, kitchen, or basement, he will not feel secure, and you will not hear him wake. Often when the puppy wakes, he just wants to be reassured that you are there. But, if he has to go outside, he should be allowed to relieve himself rather than feel compelled to soil himself and his bed. Most 10-week-old puppies sleep through the night.

Although I have put a timetable above for illustrative purposes, I do not recommend adhering to a highly rigid schedule. You do not want the puppy to become so attached to your arrival home from work at exactly 5:32 PM that he will not be able to cope with anything different. When you are late, one day, it will be difficult for him to handle. So, waking and arrival from home or school times can vary. But try to not let them shift so much that the puppy loses faith in your return, or he may not hold his desire to eliminate for your next scheduled arrival time and you will come home to a soiled puppy in a dirty crate.

If the puppy eliminates in his crate, take him outside and clean the puppy and the crate thoroughly before putting him back in his crate. Do not think that you are teaching him a lesson by making him stay in his filth. Instead, apologize to him for your inability to get to

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him when he needed you and try to reduce or eliminate situations where he cannot wait and must soil his crate.

You will notice that the schedule I suggest above only provides for a few, twenty to forty minute out of crate times for a very young puppy. That is because 8–10-week-old puppies require far more sleeping time than play breaks. Most of the trouble that folks encounter with their puppies is a direct or indirect result of sleep deprivation. Do not rely on your puppy to tell you when he needs to sleep. By the time your puppy is twelve weeks old, he will begin to have a higher need for play times and should be well on his way to being house broken. Provide plenty of nap times for the first month so that you can enjoy a well-adjusted puppy from that point onwards. Do not ask puppies (8 weeks to 10 months old) to perform extensive or strenuous exercise. You may have noticed that I speak of 8–10-week-old puppies as the youngest age you might have your puppy. I am very strongly opposed to breeders who sell puppies before they are 7.5 to 8 weeks old. To find out why, see my page on "Puppy Socialization". It will be far easier to housebreak a puppy that leaves his breeder's home at eight weeks than at six weeks. That is because the older the puppy the longer he can sleep through the night and hold his need to eliminate during the day.

Remember that any time your puppy is out of his crate and indoors you should 100% supervise him. This does not mean supervise him 85% of the time, but 100%. You do not want your puppy to make a potty mistake behind a chair in the spare bedroom and turn it into a habitual place for leaving a little poop before you ever find it. Close doors to rooms you do not want him to explore. Put up baby gates and always watch him. You do not want him to chew on an electrical cord or eat something dangerous because you were not paying attention to him. The results can be devastating. Paying absolute attention to a puppy can be very strenuous. When you are too busy to watch him, put the pup in his crate. You won't lose your mind and the puppy won't get into danger or trouble.

Also, note that I recommend that the food is removed after the puppy has had 15-30 minutes to consume whatever he wants. This will put his digestive tract on a schedule, so that he will eliminate on a schedule. Once you figure out how long after he eats a meal he needs to go outdoors, it will become a smooth transition to a completely housebroken puppy. With each passing week, the time between a meal and the pup's need to go outdoors will increase. I also recommend limiting access to water after the last meal of the

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day so that the puppy is less likely to wake in the middle of the night.

I do not recommend allowing the puppy free access to his food for several reasons. Perhaps the most important reason is that, when the food comes directly from you instead of from a food dish on the floor, the puppy will associate you as his leader and the person he must rely upon for his meals and other directions. Second, he will learn how to eat his meals all at once which lends itself to several factors. If your puppy ever goes off his feed because he is ill, you will know it sooner and be able to speak with the veterinarian better about changes in the pup's eating habits. If you travel with your dog, the fact that he is used to eating in his crate will make the travel more comfortable for him and you. It makes staying in a motel, a travel trailer or a tent easier. Because he is used to eating his whole meal at one time, you will not have to leave food out in the room or tent or your grandmother's kitchen floor. The dog will know when and where he will be fed, so he will eat more normally when away from home. Finally, if someone ever has to care for your dog in your absence it will make it easier on your pup and the care giver to be able to rely on the routine feeding schedule and location. For the most part, common sense, patience, and dedication to consistent, fair, and loving management will get you through the first year of your puppy's life. As a dog trainer, I am contacted most frequently by folks who are troubled with twelve-week-old puppies and eight-month-old puppies. I believe that the most common reason folks begin to have trouble with twelve-week-old puppies is that they have not started the puppy in a crate, and they are going crazy trying to always watch the puppy and they are having to clean up messes. The puppy is racing about, chewing everything, and making potty messes in the house. When I tell them to begin using a crate or, if they do use a crate but only when they leave the house, I give them permission to put the puppy in the crate even when they are home, but they are busy, they are very happy, and things go far more smoothly.

The most common reason that people give up their puppies is because the pup has become unruly. Typically, it is because the owner did not provide enough structure, consistency, and boundaries to their puppy from the first day they brought it home. Just like with human children, puppies are constantly seeking information about the rules of the household. A puppy that has learned the rules and boundaries and the ramifications of breaking those limits is a very happy puppy. Start young, providing a balance between confinement and time to explore the world safely through impeccable supervision, and you will be off to the right start for a lifetime of joy and wonderful companionship with your new puppy.