

A guide to toilet training your puppy;

Don't push them

First and foremost, remember your home is not a familiar environment for your puppy, and the first few days can be stressful for them. Everything is new, and your pup needs to get used to you and your movements just as much as it needs to get used to the new location – house, backyard and neighbourhood included. And it's not just the sights that matter to your dog either, but also the smells and noises.

While you should start toilet training your puppy as soon as you get home, it takes time and patience, and every puppy is different.

Watch out for the signs

There are signs your dog will show when it needs to go. These include sniffing around, fidgeting, and beginning to circle before squatting.

1 A whining or pacing dog may also be indicating that it needs to go to the toilet, as well as a dog that has been chewing on something for a while and suddenly moves to do something else.

2 If you keep a constant vigil on your pup during the toilet training process, watching out for these signs will mean fewer accidents.

Choose an area where you would like your pup to toilet – this might be a pee pad on your apartment balcony or in a bathroom, or outside. The moment your pup indicates it needs to go, take it to this area. This teaches them that they need to go to this spot or area when they feel the need to go to the toilet. Picking the pup up straight away is crucial, so they associate the act of going outside with the feeling they're getting.

It's also important to continually take your puppy out according to timings. The key times are after waking up from a nap, after eating, or after a play. Puppies can't hold their bladder for that long, so give them plenty of opportunities to go. This will of course change as they get older.

Understand associations

A puppy learns associations in training. When it comes to going to the toilet, a puppy will associate an area with a toilet because of the to the following:

Smell of urine, faeces or ammonia.

Location - when training, try to take them to same spot every time. That way, your puppy will associate that spot with going to the toilet.

The feeling of the surface beneath its paws.

Physiological things such as after food, when it wakes up, and after a play.

Commands –

when trained, dogs will associate certain words, commands or sounds with going to the toilet.

At first, it's a good idea to take your puppy out frequently. For example, set a timer for every hour. When the timer goes off, pop your puppy on a lead and take it to the designated toilet spot. Once there, be patient as your puppy may not go instantly. Give it time, but do not play while waiting otherwise your puppy may confuse toilet time with play time.²

If your puppy doesn't go, don't be alarmed. Simply take them back inside and try again a little later – dogs like humans are not robots.

If your puppy does go, reward them straight away. Use encouraging words and make a fuss that they have gone to the toilet in the correct spot.

It's also a good idea to have a little play outside once your puppy has successfully gone to the toilet. This ensures your puppy associates outside with its toilet space and a place it can play, rather than one or the other.

Add a cue

It would be ideal if your puppy learns to go on command. While it won't be needed every time, there will be moments when you'll need your puppy to go to the toilet at a specific time. For example, before bedtime or on a long car ride. Wouldn't it be great if at these times you could simply take your dog outside and say a specific word, and suddenly they'd relieve themselves? Well, it all starts as a puppy.

Whenever you take your puppy to the toilet, use the same command. For example, you could say the word 'toilet'. Say it before and during the fact. That way, whenever your dog hears the word 'toilet' they know they need to relieve themselves.

Accidents will happen

One of the most important elements you need to remember when it comes to toilet training is that accidents will happen. It's a fact of life. Crucial to this; however, is not to get angry. It's highly unlikely your dog has done this on purpose, and getting angry will only make things worse. Puppies do not have full control over their bladder. That's what toilet training is all about – teaching them how to hold and where they should be going. It's all part of the developmental process. So, accidents can happen without the dog even being able to prevent or control them.

Never shout, become angry, say 'no', or punish your dog for going in the wrong spot – it doesn't teach your dog where to go, but it does teach them to be scared about going in front of you, which makes training much harder. Don't make a fuss or an issue over it, just simply clean it up.

It's also important to use an ammonia-free cleaning product and make sure you clean it well when a puppy has an accident. If the area smells like the toilet area to your pup, it will continue to be used as one.

If you notice your dog is about to go in the wrong place and you'd like to avoid an accident, interrupt them in a calm and cheerful way, and take them to the correct spot. Remember to praise them when they go.

Reward your puppy

Positive reinforcement is a successful and effective way of toilet training. Your dog will soon associate going to the toilet in the correct spot, with the fact that it's doing something right.

The reward itself can be in the form of praise, whether it's talking to your puppy, a long pat, a tummy rub or even a play. As long as you are talking and interacting in a positive and upbeat manner, you are reinforcing good behaviour. You can also give your dog a delicious treat or its favourite toy to play with.

Other issues or difficulties

There are other elements that need to be considered, especially if your dog is having a hard time picking up toilet training. For example, being cooped up for too long can stall the process.

Sometimes dogs, especially puppies, can't hold on. If you're going to go out for a while, it's a good idea to leave your puppy in a spot where they can go if they need to.

Also, remember your puppy has gone through a change coming into your home. It's a brand new environment with new people, and this can affect the way it learns. Be kind to your puppy and give it time.

If you are really struggling with toilet training your puppy, please seek veterinary attention. Occasionally there may be a medical reason why your puppy has issues with toilet training. Your vet is the perfect professional to help you with this and advise you how to treat.