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Sandy's Pet Shop

HOUSEBREAKING DO'S AND DON'TS

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE, AND A NECESSITY

New puppy owners want their puppy to learn one thing as quickly as possible, and that is where it should and should not go to the bathroom. Housebreaking is the most important thing you can teach your puppy. Using certain training tools, lots of praise, and being consistent will help your puppy learn rapidly, but remember to also be patient!

MESSINESS IS NOT NEXT TO DOGLINESS

Puppies have very short memories. If they have finished going the bathroom in a corner of your living room and you catch them after the fact, then it is too late to do anything with the puppy. Clean up the area with a cleaner made especially for cleaning dog messes and neutralizing the odor. This is so the puppy won't be able to smell anything that will make it think it is okay to go there again. Never put their nose in it! They will not understand that it was wrong to mess in the house but can lead to them messing in very hidden places or eating their mess, which is not something you want to encourage! If you catch the puppy starting to mess, say no in an angry tone, but do not yell at the puppy. Grab it quickly and go outside. If the puppy then goes to the bathroom outside, give it lots of praise after it is done as a reward. A small treat can also be given as an award, along with some play.

KEEP IT ON A SHORT LEAD

Most owners make the mistake of letting the puppy have too much freedom in the house so they cannot observe when the puppy needs to go, as puppies will give signals like circling and sniffing an area when they are ready. It is best to keep the puppy in a small area or even better to keep it on a six foot leash that you need to keep a hold of at all times. This way you can observe the puppy for any signs that it needs to go out and then take it out before any accident occurs. The important thing is not to let the leash go so you end up chasing the puppy, which could make the puppy fearful or shy of you. When you cannot keep a good eye on the puppy, place it in a crate. Crate training is the best way to housebreak your puppy.

CRATE TRAINING 101

Puppy owners sometimes feel they do not want to use a crate because they don't want to "cage" their puppy, but puppies don't think of a crate as a cage. To them, the crate becomes their den, a safe and secure place for them. The crate should only be large enough for a puppy to turn around and lie down comfortably in. It should have something soft to lay on like a dog blanket that fills the floor space available. A toy that is only offered when the puppy is in the crate is a good idea, and even a small treat can be given to entice the puppy into the crate the first few times before it gets to know the crate as its home. Also use a command like, "Crate," so they will learn to go inside on command. The crate should never be large enough that the puppy can go the bathroom at one end and sleep in the other. This will defeat the purpose of crate training. The point of crate training is that a puppy does not want to soil the area that it must sleep in, so it will try hard not to go to the bathroom in its own crate.

IT'S MY TURN IN THE BATHROOM!

A young puppy at eight weeks of age can only hold on for three to four hours before it must go to the bathroom. Therefore a puppy must not be left in the crate for any longer than that except at night, when normally they can go about seven to eight hours. It is important to keep the puppy on a feeding schedule and to be aware of when the puppy needs to go out. Normally this will be first thing in the morning, about 15-20 minutes after eating a meal, every three to four hours, and just before bedtime. A puppy's last meal for the day should be given approximately 3 hours before they will be going to bed, with water taken away around one hour before bedtime, especially if you want the puppy to sleep through the night. No food or water should be offered in the crate, as it will make it harder for the puppy to hold it until they are taken outside.

WHO LET THE DOG OUT?

When the puppy is let out of the crate, quietly put the collar back on (which is NEVER left on when the puppy is in the crate!), attach the leash, and calmly walk the puppy out the same door to the same spot every time when you want it to go the bathroom outside. Do not play with the puppy or move from the spot chosen as the area for the puppy to go, and wait for the puppy to do its business. You can use a command, saying it quietly to the puppy like, "Go to the bathroom," over and over again, but do not give the puppy any other attention and stop saying the command when the puppy starts to go. Once the pup is completely done, wait to be sure, then give the puppy lots of praise and even a small reward. Puppies will learn quickly that when they go inside, they get nothing or even worse, an angry sounding no said to them when they are beginning to go. But when they go outside, they get praise and maybe a treat so they will want to go the bathroom outside. Then play with the puppy outside for a while as another way of rewarding your pet. Keep the "bathroom" area clean because puppies don't like to step in their own waste either, but do keep one stool in the area at first so the puppy will smell it and be reminded of what it is doing in that area.

THE GREAT CRATE

Be sure when crate training a puppy that the crate is made a safe, quiet, and secure place for the puppy to go. It should be placed in an area where people do hang out like the TV room or kitchen so the puppy will still feel like its "dog pack" is close by. The puppy must never be forced into the crate and it should never be used as a form of punishment. When you are home, the puppy should be out with you most of the time. But it is okay to put the puppy in once in a while when you are there but cannot give the puppy the attention it needs, like when people are eating at the table. In fact, it is a good idea to put the puppy in the crate when you are around because the puppy will then not associate you leaving with being put in the crate, which can cause separation anxiety.

SIT, STAY, AND BE QUIET

Do not speak to the puppy when it is in the crate at any time, even if it is whining or barking! If you do, even to shush the puppy, it will take that as attention and will whine or bark even more. Of course be sure your puppy is not hungry or needs to go to the bathroom before putting it in the crate, so you know that it does not need anything at that moment. Talking to the puppy while it is in the crate will only excite it or make it nervous, especially if you are doing it before leaving, and this can also lead to separation anxiety. So please, do not speak or react in any way to the puppy once it is in the crate and you know there are no problems. Be sure the collar has been removed, and when you let the puppy out, do so quietly and take it outside right away if the stay in the crate has been long enough that the puppy will need to go to the bathroom.

A REALITY CHECK

Puppies are very smart and can learn quickly, but like young children they can also get into trouble very fast. Remember to keep your puppy in a small area or with you on a six-foot leash at all times when you can give your attention to them. When you cannot, put the puppy in the crate or a small secure area. Puppies can be a lot of work at first, and new owners must realize that they need to put the time in early so that their puppy will learn important behaviors like where they can go to the bathroom. If you do not have the time in your life right now to devote to a puppies' needs like being trained, socialized, and played with, besides being let out every three to four hours, you may want to wait until a time you can do all this. The number one reason puppies and dogs are brought into an animal shelter is due to behavior problems like not being housebroken. But if you have the time, and are patient and consistent with your training, you will end up with a wonderful dog!