

HOUSEBREAKING 101 written by Brenda Rushman, Ohio Saint Bernard Rescue

"Housetraining an older, rescued dog is different from housetraining a puppy, on several levels. On one hand, it's much easier... the dog's bladder is older (able to hold urine for longer amounts of time), and his attention span is better. And, he's probably been housetrained somewhere else along the way, too, which means that he'll generalize the behavior faster than if he hadn't been housetrained previously. But, rescued dogs also carry baggage with them that new puppies don't. The previous owners may not have been very understanding or patient in their housetraining lessons... and they may have been downright cruel in what they've taught. You'll need to be extra patient, vigilant, and understanding, to make up for their shortcomings.

First, understand that your dog KNOWS when you're upset with him. You don't have to raise your voice, or throw things, or even give him the silent treatment. If you allow yourself to become upset, your dog will read it in your expression and your body language -- but, he won't understand WHY you're upset. He won't have a clue, except that it has something to do with him. He's under a lot of stress without this added burden, so try to keep a sense of humor about it (humor has gotten me past many, *many* rough spots!)

If you work outside the home, try to set up bringing your new family member home during a time when you'll have 2 or more days off from work. This will give both your human family and the new guy a little time to get acclimated. Also, don't allow company to bombard him over these first few days... being tossed into a new home (with a thousand new rules!) is incredibly stressful, without adding more strangers into the mix.

Make these first 2-3 days as stress-free as humanly possible. No guests, no visits to meet other family members -- just lay around the house, and get to know your dog. Find out what he knows, so that you'll know how to communicate with him... you won't regret it.

House training is not a behavior that is invincible. Any change in circumstance can cause a dog to "backslide", because they incorporate their environment into their learning. Think about this, for a minute: it's an incredibly important concept, when dealing with a rescued dog! By definition, this means that any dog placed into a new home must be treated as though he's never been housetrained before! Whether or not a rescued dog has been housetrained previously only has bearing in the time-frame of re-training: if he's been housetrained previously, he'll get the hang of it faster this time around. If your dog is allowed to have an accident, (s)he is more likely to do it again, forming a habit. If you bring a strange dog into your home, and it's allowed to have an accident, you increase the chances of other dogs in your care doing the same. A pound of prevention is worth a ton of cure! Also, if you take your dog visiting, unless he has been housetrained in this new place, it is just that -- a new place (tattoo this phrase into your brain: dogs don't generalize behaviors!). You will either have to take the time to teach him the rules, or just watch him closely for signs that he needs to go.

Before starting to teach your dog house training, read the article *The Outside Dog*, by Brandy Oliver. Millions of dogs are relegated to the backyard every year, because of a general lack of understanding between dog and owner -- many of these, because of housetraining mistakes -- there is a good chance that your dog was abandoned because of these kinds of misunderstandings. While often viewed as behavioral problems, housetraining mistakes are most often the product of a lack of

communication and understanding between dog and owner. If your dog knew what you wanted him to do, he'd do it.

Simple Rules for House Training:

Each of these rules will be addressed as they pertain to rescued dogs, and the emotional baggage that the dog may have brought with him. This will, hopefully, give you a little more insight into **why** he's doing what he's doing... I'm hoping this will help to keep him in his new home!

A note about using praise in housetraining: Start praising while the dog is in the process of eliminating, with gentle tone of voice, and continue the praise while he's going, increasing your enthusiasm as the process continues. Too much exuberance can startle him, and cause a major setback... remember, you're building trust, here!

1) No scolding or punishing for housetraining errors. Don't rub his nose in it -- that's just gross (and dangerous!) Dogs are inherently clean animals -- they would much rather do their business outside. If you haven't given him the opportunity to do it outside (and if he did it inside, you didn't) that's your fault, not his. Rubbing a dog's nose in its messes teaches the dog 2 things -- that getting really intimate with excrement is encouraged, and that he can't trust you. Scolding or punishing him teaches him that it's not safe to do his business where you can see him doing it, so if you scold him, you've just created 2 problems for yourself: a dog who won't go on-leash, because that's within your view (not safe), and a dog who will, within minutes of your bringing him back inside, do his duty the minute you turn your back on the oriental rug (is safe). So, no scolding or punishing.

If someone has already messed this up for you (those previous owners, again... they'll keep cropping up!), it will take a lot of patience, but you can get past it. This is where the "2-3 days off from work" will come in handy. By the end of these 2-3 days, following these simple rules, you should be well on your way to a very workable system with your dog.

2) Put your dog on a feeding and "outside to potty" schedule. Dogs should be fed twice daily after the age of 3 or 4 months, and dogs older than 9 months should be started on an "outside to potty" schedule of about every 4 hours. You can adjust this as necessary: for some, the stress makes them have to go more often (I pee more when I'm nervous, too!), and with some, they'd rather die than go to the bathroom in your presence -- they've probably been harshly corrected for it, at some point. If you want to make this whole process much less frustrating for both you and the dog, install a doggie door. You can read about them in the article *About Doggie Doors*, at *Doggie Door to Canine Behavior*.

Teach your dog right from the start that going to the bathroom in your presence causes the *Good Things* to happen! This will circumvent **many** problems that may come later (if you take your dog somewhere, and stop at a roadside rest stop -- you'll need him to go on-leash, and even on-command).

3) Confine him!! There are a number of techniques you can use to do this, employing baby gates, crating, hooking his leash to a belt-loop (called the "umbilical" method) -- if you can't watch him closely every minute, you can't catch him when he's about to make a mistake. It's not fair to expect him to just "know" where to go, unless you're available to teach him, so the best way, and the most humane, is to confine him in an area where he's least likely to go to the bathroom when he can't be closely supervised. By "closely supervised", I mean **IN THE SAME ROOM**, and you watching his every move!! Don't think that he won't

go while you glance through the newspaper -- he will, even if it only takes your attention off him for a second. He needs your undivided attention, in order to learn this. It's not fair, to expect otherwise.

Many people misunderstand what I mean by "confining": please don't lock your dog away from you. I want you to actually confine the dog in the same room with you -- for the first 2-3 days, pretend that you're joined at the hip with this dog. This sets him up to succeed... it builds confidence, and facilitates the bonding process.

4) Get excited about it!! Choose a "keyword" that can easily be associated with this ("outside" or "potty" are good ones), and get him worked up about it -- not so worked up that he pees on the floor! Put treats in your pocket, get his leash, go to the door, and talk in your happiest voice -- going "outside" is a GOOD thing!! When, by chance (or by design) he does do his business where you want him to, lots and lots of treats and praise -- make sure he understands just exactly how happy you are with what he's done!! Reward him while he's going, to ensure that he understands WHY you're rewarding him -- even if he momentarily stops going, in his excitement. Remember, every time you reward something, you're increasing the chances that he'll do it again -- make it worth his while to please you!! treats in your pocket, get his leash, go to the door, and talk in your happiest voice -- going "outside" is a GOOD thing!! When, by chance (or by design) he does do his business where you want him to, lots and lots of treats and praise -- make sure he understands just exactly how happy you are with what he's done!! Reward him while he's going, to ensure that he understands WHY you're rewarding him -- even if he momentarily stops going, in his excitement. Remember, every time you reward something, you're increasing the chances that he'll do it again -- make it worth his while to please you!!

But, what if he doesn't go? You *know* he has to go -- it's been 9 or 10 hours since the last time. Give him 10-15 minutes of sniffing around to find a likely spot. If he doesn't go in that amount of time (with you using a happy, encouraging tone -- don't be afraid to talk to him!), just bring him back in and hook his lead to your belt loop. Don't play with him, or anything -- just go about your business, and take him back out in another 10-15 minutes. Try again. Eventually, he'll go (he can't hold it forever, right?), and you'll be standing right there to tell him what a good boy he is -- feeding him treats *while* he's going, ofcourse! Then say "Okay -- let's PLAY!!" This tells him that going in your presence outside CAUSES the Good Things to happen. It's a *big* step toward gaining his trust in *all* situations.

It can be really helpful to find a spot that *other* dogs have used, to teach the dog to go in your presence, initially. If you don't have other dogs, confine your dog inside, and ask a neighbor to bring their dog into your yard (one time only! {grin}) for a bathroom break. Since marking behavior is instinctual for both males and females, most dogs will readily re-mark this area several times -- be ready with the to find a spot that *other* dogs have used, to teach the dog to go in your presence, initially. If you don't have other dogs, confine your dog inside, and ask a neighbor to bring their dog into your yard (one time only! {grin}) for a bathroom break. Since marking behavior is instinctual for both males and females, most dogs will readily re-mark this area several times -- be ready with the treats !!

Finally, accidents happen -- get over it. If your dog has an accident, sit down, calm down, and think about it. What could you have done to prevent it? Chances are, you either weren't watching close enough, or didn't take him out according to schedule. It's not his fault, so don't get angry. Sooner or later, he'll get it, and you'll look back on this time and laugh. (Really, you will!) Even in "special circumstances" -- no matter how dire they may seem -- patience, consistency, praise, tolerance, will, compassion, ingenuity, and a sense of humor will succeed.