**Glen Mills Veterinary Hospital**

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**CRATE TRAINING & POTTY TRAINING DOGS**

Crate training is valuable for puppies. A crate is a big asset when you start your puppy’s potty training (which is not complete until at least 4 months of age, even with the help of a crate) and it also acts as a safety zone - puppies are curious and they explore with their mouths. Many homes have inappropriate items to chew and swallow.

The crate can also be useful when your dog reaches adulthood: 1) You may find there are times where your dog would benefit from being crated (i.e. if you have a large social gathering whereby your dog is better served confined; alternatively, a convalescent period may become required at one time or another for your pet, say after a surgery, at which time a crate is very useful, 2) The crate can also become a safe haven for your dog. A place of peace and comfort, similar to a person’s own bedroom. Read more in our “**Comfort Zone**” Handout.

Housetraining generally takes several weeks, or sometimes longer. A puppy will inevitably have some accidents but if you develop a routine and stay dedicated, your pup will no doubt succeed.

A puppy can generally hold itself for approximately one hour for each month of age, i.e. a 3 month old puppy can hold itself for 3 hours, a 4-month old for 4 hours, and so on.

To get started, take your puppy outside at least every two hours. In general, it is good to take him out after he wakes up, plays, or has a meal. Signs of a dog who may need to eliminate include: barking or scratching at the door, squatting, restlessness , sniffing around, or circling.

I suggest using the same door and command each time you head outdoors for potty. It may also help to pick a prime bathroom spot outside each time. Resist the temptation to let your puppy outside unattended. There is value in you heading out with him *every* time. Linking trigger word(s) such as “go potty” during the act of elimination and providing a reward *immediately* after the act, is key to training your dog’s brain. Rewards can be in the forms of praise or unique treats. Importantly, avoid praising too early because your dog may get distracted, and then finish peeing when he’s back in your house.

I also recommend picking up your puppy's water dishabout two and a half hours before bedtime to reduce the likelihood that he'll need to eliminate during the night. Most puppies can sleep for approximately seven hours without having to eliminate. Be sure to keep night time potty sessions muted and to the point so that your puppy doesn’t mistake your mission as a time to play and start the day. Talk softly, turn on few lights and direct your dog to get the job done efficiently.

Note that your puppy should be crated anytime he can not be 100% supervised. Small spaces can be used if crates aren’t practical, i.e. bathrooms or baby-gated laundry rooms. The idea is to provide a space just big enough for your dog to comfortably stand, lie down, and turn around in. Many dogs do not enjoy lying in their own urine or feces, which is why crate training is particularly useful with potty training.

If your puppy is 100% supervised, you should be able to bear witness and intervene anytime your pup starts to inappropriately eliminate. When you catch your puppy in the act of going, I suggest startling him with a noise- i.e. clapping, slapping a table top, jiggling coins in a can, etc. – then redirecting him outside to (potentially) finish the job and earn his reward. It is important to realize that it is not appropriate or useful to punish a dog for accidents as it is a normal part of growing up and creates negative messages about you to your dog.

If you find an accident after the fact, you have one option: clean it up with an effective cleaner designed to prevent the *dog* from picking up the scent again (some products are designed for human noses and these aren’t good enough. Nature’s Miracle and Anti-Icky-Poo are good choices). Rubbing your puppy's nose in the soiled area, or taking your dog to the spot and scolding him are fruitless acts. Punishing can trigger problems such as a puppy who won't relieve itself in front of you at all; a puppy who gets defensive or worse, aggressive, out of fear of punishment; or a puppy who starts submissively urinating.

If you need help or consultation when crate or potty training your puppy, please contact us! We’d be happy to help you.