

## Four-Footed Forum

The "Four-Footed Forum" is a collection of training articles on different subjects written by Dee Ganley and Fiona Schoeler

### **"OOPS! IT WAS AN ACCIDENT!"** Four-Footed Forum, June 1998

The puppy has arrived! The kids are crazy about him, he's cute as a button and lots of fun, and oops! He's just had an accident on your best rug. Housebreaking is the least enjoyable aspect of raising a dog but we hope the following information will make it easier for you and the puppy.

Puppies have very small bladders and they digest their food quite quickly so they need to go to the bathroom very frequently. Therefore, the more often you can get the puppy outside, (always on a leash, don't forget), the fewer accidents that will occur. Don't be surprised if initially you have to make the trip every 30-45 minutes – yes, it does seem like every 10 seconds! Always go to the same spot and use whatever catchphrase you like: "go potty" or "hurry up" for example.

Allow the puppy a reasonable amount of time (2-3 minutes) to accomplish his task, then praise and reinforce (give a small food reward) when the job is done. As the puppy grows older and his bladder control gets better, he may not actually need to go to the bathroom when you take him. If this happens, after 2-3 minutes tell him, "too bad", take him back in the house and put him in his crate (told you the crate would come in handy...) for 15 minutes or so, then try again.

If you faithfully and consistently follow this regime the housebreaking period should be quite short.

You're probably wondering what happened to (and what's wrong with) the traditional "stick his nose in it, smack him, and yell NO!" This method is not all that effective. The dog in fact does not make the leap of understanding that you are hoping for; that defecating or urinating in the house is wrong – a purely human concept. Animals eliminate wherever they happen to be – there is no right or wrong place with the one exception of their den space, which in your puppy's case is his crate.

While a dog will eventually become housebroken using this method (mainly because his control becomes better), it also guarantees that you will end up with a dog that will not eliminate in front of you, which presents real problems when you go to the vet or when traveling. It is your responsibility to teach (and punishing is not teaching) the puppy where he may go to the bathroom and where he may not. This is accomplished far more readily using positive reinforcement. You want your puppy to view you as the source of all the good things in his life; traditional housebreaking methods definitely do NOT fall

under this heading.

Puppies do try to let you know when they need to go out: sniffing the floor anxiously, circling and sometimes whining are all tell-tale signs but often by the time we catch on it's too late. If the puppy has already had an accident, it's too late to take him out – again. The puppy will not make the association you are looking for. A regular timetable, no matter how many trips outside a day (or night) are necessary, will expedite the whole procedure more than anything else.

“What goes up must come down” and with puppies, what goes in must come out. Consult with your veterinarian or local trainer about how much to feed and how often – the amounts suggested on the back of the puppy chow bag are aimed at selling more food rather than what a puppy needs for healthy growth. Overfeeding can cause serious physical problems that result from the puppy growing too fast. It will also add to the number of trips you have to make outside. Free access to clean, fresh water is a must for dogs of any age but for puppies, restrict water (and food) intake after 6 PM. This will help eliminate that trip outside at 3 AM.

As your puppy grows up, you can teach him to ring a bell to let you know that he needs to go out. Begin by rewarding him for any interaction with the bell (a giant Christmas jingle bell on a string is perfect). Then hand the bell on the door and teach him to touch the bell with his nose – reinforce by saying “YES!” and giving him a food treat when he does. Follow this by immediately taking him outside to his “spot”. Again, give him a reasonable time frame to the job done. If successful, praise and treat. If not, say “too bad” and return to the house. The puppy will very quickly learn that he gets to go out when he rings the bell and that he will be rewarded (reinforced) for going to the bathroom – a good deal for everyone involved.

No matter how diligently you work on housebreaking accidents will happen. But do remember that it is just that – an accident, not something your puppy does out of spite or stubbornness or to “get back at you”. Dogs just don't think that way. Don't get angry and please don't punish your dog. The more time and effort you put into housebreaking, the sooner it will be done. Be patient, not punitive. As time consuming (and sometimes frustrating) as it may be, you can make housebreaking a positive training experience that will strengthen the positive and fun relationship that you are building with your puppy.

If you would like more information about housebreaking or need help with a specific housetraining problem, please call Dee at 735-5543 or Fiona at 735 6068.

**Also check out [HOUSE TRAINING](#)** on this website.

P.S. To all dog owners: when walking your dog or taking him out in public, please clean up after him. Plastic bags are great for this.

**BITING AND PLAYBITING** - By Dee Ganley, (assisted by Skeeter, Tucker, Abby) –  
735-5543 - Four Footed Forum

No one expects, or wants, his or her cute little pup to grow up into a dog that bites. And while a puppy's playbiting may seem harmless when he's very young, it can become a major problem as he grows older. If you don't take the opportunity NOW to teach your puppy "bite inhibition", you are asking for trouble at least, and at worst you are risking injury and/or a lawsuit and/or euthanasia for this dog. This risk and heartache can be avoided by starting some simple daily puppy training exercises as early as possible in your pup's life!

**Bite Inhibition**

If you watch a litter of puppies playing, you will notice that they spend much of their time biting and mouthing each other. Because your pup has very sharp teeth and a weak jaw, his harder bites or mouthing hurt his littermates - so they yelp and refuse to play with him for some time. Soon the pup learns that play time ends when he bites too hard. Because an adult dog has duller teeth but a very powerful jaw, Bite Inhibition (a "soft mouth") is one of the most important lessons your pup should learn while his sharp baby teeth are still in. You and all members of your household can teach this by mimicking this puppy play behavior in daily life.

**There are two steps to training Bite Inhibition:**

**STEP 1:**

Practice several times daily for 3-4 weeks. (Best for pups up to 12 weeks of age but if you've never done bite inhibition exercises, this step can be used for older pups who have varied mouthing pressure).

Allow pup to mouth/playbite. When he exerts slightly more pressure than usual, say "Ouch!" just loud enough that he stops in surprise, and immediately stop playing for a few seconds. Now allow him to mouth again and repeat the "Ouch!" and stop playing steps several times until he ONLY mouths softly. If your pup is not responding to the "Ouch!" simply skip it and just stop playing and/or get up and move away for a minute, then start again. Your pup will quickly learn that fun ends when he mouths too hard.

**STEP 2: (Only after Step 1 has been completed)**

Now, any and every time his teeth make contact with human skin, say "OUCH!" and immediately stop playing. Get up and leave and/or ignore the pup for a minute or two. Your pup should now start to believe that humans are very sensitive and cannot stand the incredible pain of any tooth contact to their skin. The point of these bite inhibition exercises is to first teach your pup to have a "soft mouth" (Step 1), and then to teach him that the instant his teeth touch human skin, playtime is over (Step 2).

Remember, if your pup doesn't respond to the "Ouch" or seems to get more riled up, just skip it and simply stop playing or interacting in any way put him in his crate if you have one, for a few minutes or a couple of hours depending on your time frame, remember this is a time out. If you can do this every time he bite to hard then he will stop biting you, It won't be worth the consiquence.

Using these simple training exercises with consistency and repetition, can help your puppy or young dog grow up to be the kind of pet that is a pleasure to be around.