

BowWOW!

Facts, observations and musings about Our Best Friends

Minding your Pees and Cues

Madison, a three-year-old cairn terrier, is a good companion, great with the kids and is darned cute. But she has a dark secret. She is not housetrained. Madison is clueless as to when or where she's supposed to Go. Left to her own initiative she will leave "gifts" atop the laundry, on the bathmat and has even soaked her human's sneakers.

The reason for her unfortunate social faux pas can be traced to her early years in a badly managed breeding kennel. During her early months she was not formally housetrained and was forced to use her living space for, ahem!, her business, a practice all dogs find abhorrent. Unfortunately, by the time Madison was adopted, this behavior was set in stone.

Improper elimination practices can be attributed to other reasons, too. A dog with a medical issue or infection or even certain medications will contribute to house soiling. Sometimes a dog is asked to "hold it" for too long with unfortunate results. Small breeds, puppies or the elderly often have trouble holding it all day. And sometimes the dog simply doesn't understand the rules of "the house".

To be fully housetrained, Madison needs to know where she *should* Go as well as where she should not. She must learn how to "hold it" until she is in an appropriate place. She must know how to communicate her needs to her human in a way that the human will understand. And she must know that this behavior applies to all locations. For instance, it is still not OK to pee on Grandma's oriental rug.

Supervise your dog when she is inside (except when crated or otherwise confined). *Supervise* means remaining focused on what your dog is doing at all times so as to prevent any opportunity for the dog to make a mistake. The easiest way to do this is to "wear" your dog by clipping her leash to your belt loop. The lead should be long enough for her to move around, sit or lay at your feet, but short enough to prevent her from creating a mess without your knowledge.

Confine your dog if you cannot keep an eye on her. Because dogs find it repulsive to soil where they sleep, a properly-sized crate is a perfect place for your dog to bide her time.

Create a routine. What goes in on schedule, comes out on schedule. Establish regular waking, feeding, walking and sleeping times. Take her out upon awakening, after eating and drinking, before leaving home, when you first arrive home and before bedtime.

Show her where to go. This is an important but often overlooked step. Pick a spot in the yard where it will be convenient for you and *take* her there. When she Goes in the chosen spot, praise her lavishly, give her a treat and then go back inside. With repetition she will automatically head for “her” spot every time. This also facilitates clean-up by confining this somewhat unpleasant task to a smaller area.

Read her signals. Most dogs will not head for the door when nature calls. However, they may pace, circle, pant, stare at you or just smile anxiously. Also, try to anticipate: does she need to outside when company comes? after a game of fetch?

And, the most important: **when accidents happen, don't punish!** It's perfectly acceptable to interrupt midstream with a clap or other noise and then rush her outside. But, when you find a “mistake”, do not punish. Simply clean it up with an enzyme neutralizing cleaner. Punishment will only retard your progress by making your dog afraid to Go in front of you.

You'll be able to create a new routine in a couple of weeks. But it may take a few months for your dog to perform reliably, especially if she has been soiling the house for years. The success of this training depends on you.

BowWOW! Is a production of Tracie Korol and wholeDog.
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