

Trudi Thorpe runs dogLOGIC Dog Training based in Sydney and specialises in Individual Behavioural Strategies, Puppy Pre-School and Adult Dog Classes. She is an AABP Professional Dog Trainer, Accredited Delta CGC Instructor, Accredited Delta CGC Assessor and a Certified Dog Behavioural Trainer. She is a member of the Delta Professional Dog Trainers Association, The Association of Animal Behaviour Professionals and the Association of Pet Dog Trainers.

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Ask Trudi a question regarding behaviour by emailing behaviour@urbananimal.net

Hi Trudi

My daughter has a 17 week old moodle puppy who was almost 95% toilet trained up until the last week. From the age of 10 weeks, she was at doggy day care while my daughter was at work (she is a school teacher). Between doggy day care and weekends at home the puppy was almost fully toilet trained. Doggy day care has now closed, and my daughter leaves her at home inside as the backyard is in a rental property and isn't 100% puppy proof. They have tried to fix things, but in an 8-hourr day she would get bored, and either cry constantly or manage to get out.

I have her one day a week, therefore she is inside four days a week. This has been for two weeks now. During the night she had been using wee pads since the time she first came home. Previously, when she was inside for short times she would use the wee pads. The last few days we have noticed that she has had a number of accidents inside on the carpet when we are home. She has come in from outside and does it straight away, or watches you and just squats instead of walking to the back door as she had done previously.

I feel that this could be because she is inside four days a week. My daughter said that sometimes she would find a poo or one wee on the floor tiles near the back door when she came home, and this was to be expected, but our concern is the number of accidents in the last few days happening right in front of us.

Could you please give us any ideas on how to solve this problem?

regards Kerrie

Hi Kerrie

Toilet training can be one of the most frustrating things to teach a puppy, because it takes time to do it properly. It sounds to me as though your puppy is just a little confused as to what it is that you want her to do. Most of the time when we see a regression in toilet training it is because we think the puppy seems to have "got it" and we drop our guard far too early. It takes five months or so to toilet train a puppy, so you need to stay vigilant well and truly past the time that the puppy starts taking herself to the designated spot. Puppies don't get any level of bladder control until around 16 weeks of age, and even then, it doesn't happen overnight. To go to the toilet where and when they feel like it is a natural dog behaviour. To go in a designated spot is a complex human behaviour. Because we are the ones that want our dogs to understand and perform this ideal, it is entirely up to us to train them how to go about it correctly. There is no such thing as a "half" toilet trained dog. They either get the concept or they don't, and once they get it, they will go to that designated spot every time.

Dogs learn by repetition and association, so you have to build up the association between a full bladder and going to the designated toileting spot by taking the pup there BEFORE she toilets anywhere else. It is best if you only have one spot for her to go (in each house), so that it's not so confusing. There are certain key times that you know for sure she is going to need to toilet, so use these to your advantage to get her to the spot before she goes anywhere else. These times are; within 30 seconds of her waking up from a sleep; after a play session; 10 minutes after having anything to eat or drink; and every 1-1½ hours outside of those times. It's often a good idea to have a notepad handy to jot down the times that she toilets so that you can get an idea of how often she is going. Once you see a pattern forming, you can adjust the times that you are taking her to the toileting spot to suit her individual toileting habits.



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Whenever she is by herself at home during the day, she needs to be confined to an area that has tiled or sealed floors (both the bathroom and the laundry are good options). Dogs are very conscious of different floor surfaces, and some surfaces such as carpets and rugs can actually encourage the puppy to toilet on them. So avoid carpeted areas and temporarily roll up rugs and mats so that she is on a sealed floor for those times that she is by herself. This way you can effectively clean up any accidents, and there is no ammonia residue left deep down in the underfelt that will activate triggers in her brain causing that toileting response. The toilet training takes effect when your daughter and yourself are actively with her.

She needs things to do to occupy her during the day when she is at home alone. Cardboard is great for puppies as they can rip and tear it apart and chew on it to their heart's content. Insides of toilet rolls, empty tissue boxes, egg cartons etc. Raw bones (big enough that they are not a choking hazard), are also good to leave, along with a handful of different toys and, of course, fresh water.

Probably the most important thing about toilet training a puppy is never to reprimand her if she goes in the wrong spot! If you reprimand a puppy for going in the wrong spot, the puppy will always associate the reprimand with going to the toilet – NOT for going to the toilet in the wrong spot! They will then become secretive when they need to go to the toilet, because they get into trouble and will start going when your back is turned, or they will go behind a couch or anywhere else out of sight. They will not go in front of you when you take them outside to the designated spot for fear of getting into trouble, and it all makes it very difficult to get it right.

It's not difficult to toilet train a puppy, it just takes time and patience. Take the time to show her what you want her to do and be consistent. It won't take long before she understands what you want her to do and where you want her to go, and from then on you have yourself a toilet trained dog! 🐾

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