

# Ask A Vet: Potty Problems

*Sunday, December 4, 2016*

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

My kids got a new dog from the shelter about a month ago and he is so hard to potty train! My wife and I work full time and he keeps having accidents in his crate while we are a work. What can we do?

Signed,  
Concerned

Dear Concerned,

Kudos to you for adopting an adult dog who needed a home! Many dogs whom were potty trained prior to entering the shelter may lose their house-training while there. Rest assured, it's never too late to teach an old dog "new" tricks! First thing's first – schedule an appointment with your veterinarian. She will do a complete physical exam on your pet and recommend any lab work to rule out any physical problems. Urinary tract infections are a common cause of accidents in the house and can make potty training difficult, if not impossible, for your pooch. Once your pet is given a clean bill of health, you will know his accidents are behavioral in nature and can begin training.

Establishing a routine is imperative to house training. Take him out at the same time everyday. Every time he eliminates outside, praise him generously and give him a treat. This praise and treat combo should be done outside before he comes back in the house. Have an area of the yard that is the "bathroom spot." Take him out to this spot each time and do not play with or engage the dog until AFTER he goes to the bathroom. If you clean up a mess inside, leave the rags in the bathroom spot to help your pooch recognize this as the "bathroom area." Saying a phrase when he eliminates, like "go potty," or "hurry up" will allow you to remind him what he is supposed to be doing. Feeding your dog on a set schedule will also make his bowel movements more regular.

Supervision and confinement are critical to the success of your house training efforts! Your dog should be watched at all times when he is indoors. Tether your dog to you with a leash or confine him to the room you are in. As soon as you notice signs your dog has to go – sniffing around, circling, take him out to the bathroom spot and offer praise and treats. If you cannot watch your dog, he should be confined to a crate or small area in the house. The crate should only be big enough for him to comfortably stand, turn around and lie down. If he has been in the crate for awhile, take him out to the bathroom and praise and treat him.

If your dog has an accident and you do not catch him in the act, do nothing but clean it up. Use an enzymatic cleaner to completely remove the urine smell - dogs will repeatedly soil an area that smells like urine or feces. Do not punish him. Animals do not understand punishment after the fact. If you catch your dog going to the bathroom in the house, make a loud noise to interrupt him and take him outside. Give him lots of praise and a treat if he finishes his business outside.

With a little patience, lots of praise and consistency, your dog will be re-housetrained in no time. If you have questions, or suspect your pet has a medical problem related to his inappropriate bathroom habits, contact your local veterinarian.

-Dr. Ashley Vander Wey

