

HUMANE SOCIETY OF INDIANAPOLIS

Canine Elimination Issues

Before you assume that a house soiling problem is a behavior problem, possible physical problems must first be ruled out. A dog that is eliminating in the house should be examined by a veterinarian to determine if any intestinal parasites, infections, disease, or other physical problems are present. Once all medical problems have been ruled out by a veterinarian the owner can approach treating the elimination issue as a behavioral problem.

Determining the Cause

If you have a thorough and accurate history, it will lead you directly to an opinion. To determine which of the scenarios below is the most likely, the answer should be “yes” to most of the questions under each category.

Physiological (illness or parasites) - Refer to Veterinarian

- Is there blood in the urine? Does the urine have a dark color or a strong odor?
- Is this a sudden change in a formerly well-housetrained dog?
- Is there a more frequent or urgent need to eliminate?
- Is the dog straining to eliminate?
- Is the dog dribbling or urinating small amounts?
- Is the dog licking the urethral or anal area excessively?
- Does the dog have diarrhea, soft stools, or constipation?
- Are there other signs of illness - depressed, lethargic, not eating?
- Is the dog geriatric?

Lack of reliable housetraining

- **If the dog is younger than 6 months, assume that this is the primary diagnosis after ruling out medical possibilities.**
- Has the dog always house soiled, even if intermittently?
- What is the longest period in which there was no evidence of the problem? If there has not been a period of 3-6 months without problems, consider this as a possible cause.
- Does soiling occur shortly after the dog is brought inside?
- Is there a large volume of urine? (not just a few dribbles or small amounts)
- Is the problem usually both urination and defecation?

NOTE: Some dogs may not be reliably housetrained, but have learned to discriminate when punishment will occur. Thus, they may have house soiled when the owner is not home, but will not when the owner is present. For an accurate diagnosis, this circumstance must be carefully differentiated from separation anxiety.

Surface or location preferences

- Did the dog have a restricted early environment?
- Was the dog paper-trained?
- Does the problem usually occur in a similar place, and/or on similarly textured surfaces?
- Is the dog young/old/small/short-coated and doesn't tolerate bad weather or very cold temperatures?

Separation anxiety

- Has the dog demonstrated that she is reliably housetrained? (period of 3-6 mths without accidents, no accidents occur in when owner is home)
- Does soiling occur only when left alone?
- Does soiling occur consistently when the dog is alone?
- Is it both urination and defecation? It can be either one or both.

- Does soiling usually occur within 20-30 minutes of the owner's departure? (Often patrons will not know the answer to this question, so another way to ask the question is "Does the soiling occur even if you are only gone a short time?")
- Does the dog show other behaviors consistent with separation anxiety? (destructive, unable to be confined, barks, Velcro dog in presence of owner)

Fears and phobias

- Has the dog demonstrated fear of thunderstorms or loud noises?
- Does the dog have a generally timid temperament?
- Does soiling occur only when the fear- or anxiety-producing situation occurs?
- Is the problem urination, defecation, or both? (can be any combination)
- Are fearful or submissive behaviors observed during fear-producing situations? (tail tucked, trembling, ears back, crouching, pacing, panting, whining)

Territorial marking

- Is the problem primarily urination? (Dogs may rarely mark with feces.)
- Is the urine found in small quantities in a variety of locations?
- Is the dog a male and is he intact? Intact males are *much* more likely to mark.
- Is the context consistent with marking? (For example, new objects, items with an unfamiliar smell, or places/objects that smell of another animal.)
- Are the marked areas in prominent locations? (e.g., doorways, corner of room)
- Are there conflicts with other dogs in the house, dogs running through the yard, or dogs in neighboring yards?
- Does the dog frequently urine-mark outdoors?

Submissive or excitement urination

- Does it occur during greetings, when the dog is excited, when she's being scolded, reached for, or while playing?
- Does the dog have a generally timid temperament?
- Is there a history of scolding or punishment after the fact?
- Is the dog still a puppy? (less than 6 months old)
- Is the dog sensitive to punishment?
- Is the urination accompanied by either submissive or fearful postures? (crouching, rolling over on the back, ears back, tail tucked)

Attention-seeking behavior (rare)

- Does the problem usually occur in the owner's presence?
- Can you identify a reinforcer (i.e., social interaction) as a result of the behavior?
- Does the dog show other attention-seeking behaviors? (jumping up, barking)
- Is the dog poorly trained or out of the owner's control?
- Is it urination, defecation, or both? (it can be one or both)

Recommendations

Recommendations must be based on successfully determining the cause of the elimination issue. Recommendations for elimination problems combine modifying the household routine, renewing housetraining procedures, and using behavior modification techniques. When you have determined the cause(es), match the following recommendations to the category.

Recommendations: Physiological (illness or parasites) - Refer to Veterinarian

Recommendations: Lack of reliable housetraining

- Implement age-appropriate housetraining procedures.
- Punishment should not be used. If the dog is caught in the act, simply take the dog outside and clean up later.
- Create command phrases for going outside ("Do you need to go potty?") and for eliminating ("Hurry up") and use positive reinforcement when the dog responds appropriately to either/both.
- Make soiled areas less attractive by using a surface aversive (sticky tape, upside-down carpet runner) or creating an aversive odor (room fresheners, deodorants).
- Clean thoroughly using appropriate products (Natures Miracle, Get Serious) See public handout about proper cleaning procedures.

Recommendations: Separation Anxiety – Refer to Animal Behavior Program Coordinator

In the meantime you can recommend that owners:

- Stop all punishment. Punishment will make the problem worse.
- **Do NOT crate the dog.** Instead, create other kinds of “safe places” when possible. A safe place should confine loosely rather than strictly (a room with a window and distractions rather than total isolation), should include access to busy toys for distraction, should include dirty laundry to lend a calming olfactory cue or other safety cues.
- Avoid comforting and/or soothing the dog while she displays anxious behavior. Reinforce calm or confident behavior.
- A dog door may be helpful in mild cases if the yard is escape-proof.
- Consider the possibility of distracting and occupying the dog by taking her to visit a “doggie day care” or to stay with a friend several days a week.
- Implement “Nothing In Life is Free” to encourage confidence and positive associations.
- Clean thoroughly using appropriate procedures.
- Consult with their veterinarian.

Recommendations: Fears and phobias

- Identify what stimuli trigger the fearful behavior.
- Isolate the dog from fear-eliciting stimuli if possible. This is very important to the effectiveness of the behavior modification process.
- **Punishment should never be used**, since this will increase fear and worsen the problem.
- Do not crate the dog, since close confinement may make a fear or anxiety problem worse. Instead, create other kinds of “safe places” when possible. A safe place should confine loosely rather than strictly (a room with a window and distractions rather than total isolation), should include access to busy toys for distraction, should include dirty laundry to lend a calming olfactory cue or other safety cues. Some dogs consider their crates to be “safe places”, but generally this is when the gate remains open
- Do not force the dog into fear-inducing situations.
- Avoid comforting and/or soothing the dog while she displays fearful behavior. Reinforce calm or confident behavior. This might be achieved (at first) by distracting the dog with active play and reinforcing the behavior with “jolly talk”. As the dog calms, reinforce quiet, calm behavior.
- Implement “Nothing In Life is Free” to encourage confidence and positive associations.
- Consult with veterinarian
- Refer to Animal Behavior Program Coordinator
- Clean thoroughly using appropriate procedures.

Recommendations: Territorial marking

- Neuter, if not done already.
- Identify eliciting stimuli (this can be difficult).
- Remove eliciting stimuli if possible:
 - ✓ do not walk the dog in areas where she is likely to confront other dogs
 - ✓ limit urine-marking so it occurs only during walks
 - ✓ eliminate access to doors/windows which might allow dog to see animals outdoors
 - ✓ resolve conflicts between household dogs (may require professional help)
 - ✓ do not leave unfamiliar items in reach
- If stimuli cannot be avoided, change the context of the eliciting event (e.g., pair unfamiliar objects with a food treat, associate with play)
- Implement “Nothing In Life Is Free”.
- If only a few places are marked, restrict access to them or booby-trap them via remote punishment techniques.
- Make soiled areas less attractive by using a surface aversive (sticky tape, upside-down carpet runner) or creating an aversive odor (room fresheners, deodorants).
- Clean thoroughly using appropriate procedures.
- Consult with veterinarian
- Refer to Animal Behavior Program Coordinator

Recommendations: Submissive or excitement urination

- Stop all punishment or scolding.
- Keep greetings low-key, avoiding even direct eye contact.
- Do not inadvertently reinforce behavior with attention during greetings.
- Ignore the dog until he is calm.
- Approach the dog by bending at the knees to get down to the dog's level rather than leaning over to pet the dog; pet from under the chin, not the top of the head; approach the dog from the side rather than head-on.
- Avoid comforting and/or soothing the dog while she displays fearful behavior. Reinforce calm or confident behavior.
- Implement "Nothing In Life is Free" to encourage confidence and positive associations.
- Clean thoroughly using appropriate procedures.
- While working on modification, encourage outdoor greetings.

Recommendations: Surface or location preferences

- Identify preferences.
- Restrict access to the inappropriate preference.
- For surface preference, create a version of the preferred texture in the designated elimination location.
- Implement age-appropriate housetraining procedures to attempt to create new preferences.
- Make soiled and/or preferred areas less attractive by using a surface aversive (sticky tape, upside-down carpet runner) or creating an aversive odor (room fresheners, deodorants).
- Clean thoroughly using appropriate procedures.

Recommendations: Attention-seeking behavior

- Quietly praise the dog whenever she is behaving appropriately (lying quietly, chewing on acceptable toys). Catch the dog being good and reward her for it!
- Identify what reinforces the behavior. Remove any reinforcement for inappropriate elimination. Do not reward through punishment, chasing, shouting, etc.
- Implement "Nothing In Life is Free". Sit, down, come, and stay commands should be taught using positive reinforcement such as food, praise, and petting.
- Use commands to give the dog a positive alternative to inappropriate elimination (see basic housetraining procedure).
- Provide consistent interactive play/exercise time that begins when the dog is behaving acceptably -- NOT when the dog demands it and NOT immediately before leaving the dog alone (which could worsen a mild case of separation anxiety).
- Enroll the dog in an obedience class and work with her consistently.
- Enlarge the dog's world by expanding her environment. Take walks along different routes and encourage exploration (on leash, with people).
- Clean thoroughly using appropriate procedures.

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Elimination Issues – Dogs and Puppies

Possible Cause	Clues gathered from history
Physiological (e.g. illness or parasites)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical exam, lab results, straining, dribbling, blood in urine, increased or more urgent urination, excessive licking in urethral area, unusual stools or constipation, or behavioral changes
Lack of Reliable Housetraining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extended house soiling problems, i.e., no extended period (3 to 6 months) without soiling Soiling occurs even after being taken outside Involves both urination and defecation including large volume of urine If younger than 6 months, assume that this is primary diagnosis
Surface or Location Preference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elimination occurs in or on same/similar locations or surfaces During original housetraining, dog was restricted to particular environment or paper-trained Characteristics of dog (age, size or breed) make it adverse to cold and/or wet weather conditions
Separation Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dog is reliably housetrained as demonstrated by extended periods (3 to 6 months) of no soiling Occurs only and consistently when left alone, usually within 20 to 30 minutes of departure Dog demonstrates other behaviors (such as destruction) that might be consistent with separation anxiety
Fears and Phobias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dog is known to be fearful of specific stimuli, such as thunder, loud noises, etc. Only when specific fear producing stimuli are presented Displays fearful gestures such as trembling, panting, pacing
Territorial Marking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dog is intact (not neutered or spayed) Small quantities of urine in variety of locations associated with vertical surfaces and prominent locations Other animals share household (potential conflicts) or invade territory (run through yard or “taunt”)
Submissive or Excitement Urination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occurs during greeting, when excited or during play Dog is young, timid, shy, sensitive to punishment, has history of punishment – or combination of these factors Urination is accompanied by submissive or fearful body postures
Attention-Seeking Behavior (rare)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occurs in owner’s presence and reinforcing consequences can be identified Dog demonstrates other attention-seeking behaviors

BASIC HOUS TRAINING PROCEDURES

Housetraining puppies and retraining adult dogs requires essentially the same process. Retraining a previously trained dog will usually take less time than housetraining a puppy. Patrons should have realistic expectations about housetraining including:

- Puppies cannot be expected to control their bladder and bowels for long periods until they are five to six months old.
- Some puppies are not fully housetrained until they are eight or nine months old.
- An adult dog in a new environment will not necessarily retain housetraining habits from her previous home or be able to communicate her need to go outside. Retraining is the best prevention.
- Except for age-related limitations, how “reliably” housetrained a dog or puppy may be is directly related to the consistency, method, and “reliability” of the housetraining process. In other words, the weight of responsibility for “reliability” is on the patron, not on the dog or puppy.

Housetraining procedures make use of a dog’s natural tendencies to eliminate away from her den. Over a period of time, the dog is taught to think of the entire house as her “den”. Appropriate housetraining procedures include the following:

- Supervise all activity; do not allow the dog free run of the house.
- Restrict access to any previously soiled areas.
- Put the dog on a regular feeding schedule of high-quality food, rather than allowing “free-choice” feeding. Unless you establish a routine for when the dog takes in food, it is impossible to gauge when the dog will need to eliminate that food. Ingestion and elimination have a rhythm.
- Establish two different phrases that will mean to the dog, “Do you want to go outside to eliminate?”, and once there, “Go do your business.”
- Take the dog outside (on leash) at regular intervals, going to the same location each time.
- Take the dog outside after feeding, playing, or sleeping.
- Go outside with the dog and provide praise and a small tidbit for eliminating in the proper place. Owners need to be reminded that positive reinforcement is an important part of housetraining.
- If you catch the dog in the act of eliminating inside the house, distract him, take him outside to the designated elimination area, encourage him to finish eliminating, and reward him for doing so.
- If you find the “accident” after it has occurred, gather the waste into a paper towel and put it in the designated elimination area. By placing her waste in that spot, the dog will have a reminder – an olfactory cue – to eliminate in that spot again.

Consistent Routines

The more consistent the dog’s daily schedule, the easier housetraining will be. The dog should be put on a regular feeding schedule as opposed to free-choice feeding (continuous access to a bowl of food). How many times the dog should be fed daily will depend on the dog’s age. Adult dogs can be fed once or twice a day, puppies three times a day depending on their age and health. A high-quality food can be very helpful in housetraining; fewer indigestible ingredients lead to less stool (and less wasted money!). Regular times for exercise (walking and playing) are also helpful. The dog should be taken outside to eliminate every 2 hours or so when the owners are home and also after eating, playing, and sleeping.

Rewarding Good Behavior

Establish two command phrases: one that means, “Do you need to go out?” and another that means, “Go do your business!” The exact words chosen are not important, as long as all family members use them consistently. The owner should go outside with the dog and repeat the second phrase (“Hurry up”, for example) as the dog begins to eliminate. When the dog finishes, he should be given quiet praise, petting, and a small tidbit of food. Most pet owners forget to reward a dog for appropriate behavior; the importance of doing so consistently **MUST** be emphasized.

Housetraining must be understood as a two-phased lesson: teaching the dog where **NOT** to eliminate (with interruptions or distractions, **NOT** with punishment), and teaching the dog where she **IS** to eliminate.

Supervision

Puppies or adult dogs in new environments are likely to get themselves into trouble if left unsupervised **for ANY period of time**. “Supervision” means directly watching the dog – not just being in the same room. It is not anthropomorphic to use the analogy of a human toddler, who can wreak havoc in the blink of an unsupervisory eye!

When dogs or puppies are allowed too much free access and/or are allowed to have multiple, avoidable accidents, then the housetraining process will take much longer. They should not initially have free access to the entire house, especially at night. Encourage callers to keep their new dog in sight and to always have her in the same room with them except when confined. A dog’s access can be restricted using baby gates, closing doors to unoccupied rooms, or even by tethering the dog to the owner (attach a four to six foot lead from the dog’s collar to the owner’s belt).

Confinement.

When the patron is unable to directly supervise the dog, he should either be confined to a small room of the house or crated. Crates are often misused in housetraining procedures. A dog or puppy should not be crated longer than he can reasonably be expected to control his bladder or bowels. Creating a situation in which the dog soils his own crate not only defeats the purpose of the crate, but makes it much harder to achieve the desired end result. Puppies should not be left for more than three to four hours. If it is likely the dog will need to eliminate when left alone, the confinement area should be large enough to provide a sleeping and playing area, as well as an area for elimination. Crates may be used with small breed dogs, but large breed dogs will probably need to be confined in a small room or garage (**IF** it is warm/cool enough, has been dog-proofed, and has been provided with stimulation toys and comfort objects). The dog should be properly crate-trained, as described in that chapter, not just put in a crate and then left for an entire workday.

NO Punishment

The chapter about learning theory explains in detail why attempts at punishment after the fact are not appropriate or effective. Punishment alone will not establish housetrained behavior. Dogs are much better at learning where the *right* places are to eliminate, than where *not* to eliminate. Positive reinforcement and structuring the dog’s environment are the most effective techniques. If the dog is caught eliminating in the house, direct punishment from the owner may teach the dog that the owner is not happy, but most often results in either 1) a dog who eliminates when nobody is around, or 2) a dog who is fearful of the owner. Rather than punish the dog, the patron should take the dog outside and then quietly clean up the mess. Going outside to eliminate, and eliminating in front of the owner, should never be associated with bad things happening.

Callers may tell you that, “I housetrained my other dog by rubbing his nose in it and then tossing him outside!”. Although the dog may have become housetrained in some form, it was not likely because of that technique. In some cases, the dog becomes housetrained in spite of, not because of, the techniques applied. Consistent punishment after the fact may have been a form of aversive conditioning that taught the dog to avoid certain locations. From the owner’s perspective, this may be described as a technique that “worked”.

Allowing Gradual Freedom

Many callers forget to make a gradual transition from strict supervision to allowing the dog free access to the house. Encourage them not to forget this important step. In other words, if the dog has not house soiled when confined to a small room for several hours, then she should **not** then be left free in the house for an entire workday. Either the confinement area can be gradually made larger, and/or the dog can be left free for very short periods (less than 30 minutes) that are gradually lengthened.