

Bimberg Reg'd Boxers

House Training

The Basics

House training involves the use of a crate. Dogs do not like to soil their beds because they would be forced to lay in the mess. It works, and while in these confines, most pups will control their bladder and bowels for a longer time than we would expect. Young puppies, at 8 or 9 weeks of age can often last for 7 or 8 hours, however, I would never recommend leaving them unattended in a crate for that long in most circumstances. A typical rule of thumb is their age in months plus 2, that's how many hours they can comfortably hold their bladders. For example, a 4 month puppy can easily hold their bladders for 6 hours.

During housebreaking, whenever the puppy is inside the home but cannot be watched, he is placed in the crate. This is key to avoiding accidents. Every accident your puppy has sets back his potty training. This might be while you are cooking, reading to the children, or even away from the home. The last thing you do before you put the puppy in the crate is take him outside to his favorite spot. The first thing you do when you take the puppy out of the crate is another trip outside. Overnight is definitely crate time. As your faith in the puppy grows, leave him out for longer and longer periods of time.

Using too large of a crate can often cause long term problems. The puppy will go to one corner of the cage and urinate or defecate. After a while, he will then run through it tracking it all over the cage. If this is allowed to continue, the instincts about not soiling his bed or lying in the mess will be forgotten and the puppy will soon be doing it every day when placed in the crate. Now a house training method has turned into a behavioral problem as the puppy's newly-formed hygienic habits becomes his way of life.

Preventing Accidents

The best way to house train a puppy is to establish a pattern. In this case, the pattern is: "pottying is ALWAYS done outside". We have talked about crate training and how it can help, but what about when you're home? How can you make sure your eagle eye is always watching your puppy? We've all heard people say, "I turned away for a second and he peed." So what can we do?

A common mistake is giving your puppy free reign of your house when outside of his crate. It is impossible to watch a puppy when he is darting in and out of every room. By giving your puppy too much freedom you are setting him up to fail. Until you have a solid house training routine established, the basic rule of thumb is the puppy goes where you go. If you are in the kitchen washing dishes, put up a baby gate to keep him confined to your area. When watching TV in the living room, figure out

how to block him from exiting the room. If your puppy is kept in the same room as you, the chances of having an unsupervised accident drop significantly.

Another way of establishing a habit is to stay one step ahead of your puppy. Become an expert on his body clock. You should pick up fairly quickly how long he plays between urinations or the fact that he needs to potty after every meal. If he is 'due' to go, take him outside. Again, set him up for success. If you can provide him the opportunities to make the right choice automatically, the entire house training process will be over before you know it. It may seem like you are outside every 20 minutes, but I assure you, the time invested is well worth it.

Auditory Cues

Once the puppy realizes he needs to eliminate outside, sometimes a typical house breaking road block will be how the puppy tells you he needs to go. Often you will run into a situation where the puppy will eliminate by the back door. Your puppy is trying to eliminate outside, but can't make it past the door without your help. So how will he tell you when he needs out? A simple solution is to hang or place a bell by the door you want him to use. Make sure it is well within reach of your puppy. Before every (and I mean every) trip outside, gently grab your puppy's paw and physically ring the bell with it. It won't take long for your puppy to learn that 'ringing bell = open door'. This way, when your puppy needs to eliminate outside, he can simply ring the bell and you will know your puppy needs to go outside. It's very easy to teach and only takes about 1-2 days of bell ringing before the concept 'clicks' with your puppy.

Once outside, try to encourage the pup to get on with the act in question. Keep repeating a phrase like "Go potty", "Hurry up" or "Get it done". This will associate a verbal cue with the action and can be very handy on trips or out in public. Using the word will let your dog know what you need from him and he will eliminate almost on cue. As soon as they eliminate, it is very important to praise them lavishly and make a big deal about his success before returning back inside. You can also use treats as a reward, but the cheering is key. Boxers will be thrilled when they do something that result in fun and excitement on behalf of their owners.

When An 'Accident' Happens

One of the key issues in housebreaking is to follow **The Golden Rule: If you do not catch your puppy doing it, then do not punish him for it!** I do not care what someone else may tell you or what you read, if you find a mess that was left when you were not there, clean it up and forget it.

Discipline will not help because unless you catch the puppy in the act, he will have no idea what the scolding is for. Your puppy has urinated and defecated hundreds of times before he met you. Mom or the breeder always cleaned it up. Nobody made a fuss before and the pup will not put the punishment, regardless of its form, together

with something he has done without incident numerous times before. Especially if he did it more than 30 seconds ago! Puppies are just like children. Unless something was really fun (and a repetitious act like going to the bathroom is not), they are not thinking about what they did in the past. They are thinking about what they can do in the future. At this point in his life a puppy's memory is very, very poor.

Anyway, let us face it. It was your fault, not the puppy's. If you had been watching, you would have noticed the puppy suddenly walking or running around in circles with his nose down smelling for the perfect spot to go to the bathroom. The puppy will show the same behavior every time. It may vary a little from pup to pup but they always show their own "pre-potty pattern" before the act.

The same should be said as to your first reaction when you actually catch them in the act of urinating or defecating. It is your fault; you were not watching for or paying attention to the signals. Do not get mad. Quickly, but calmly pick them up and without raising your voice sternly say "NO." Do not wait until your puppy is finished piddling, interrupt them immediately. It will help to push their tail down while you are carrying them as this will often help them to stop urinating or defecating any more.

They are going to be excited when you get them outside, but stay there with them a while and if they finish the job, reward them with lots of praise and perhaps a treat.

In the disciplining of dogs, just like in physics, every action has a reaction and for training purposes these may not be beneficial. If you overreact and severely scold or scare the heck out of a puppy for making what is in your mind a mistake, your training is probably going backwards. With house training this is especially difficult for them to understand as they are carrying out a natural body function. Carried one step farther is the idea of rubbing a puppy's nose into a mistake he made, whether you caught him or not. In the limits of a puppy's intelligence, please explain to us the difference of rubbing his nose in his mess he left in your kitchen an hour ago versus the one the neighbor's dog left in the park two weeks ago. If the dog were smart enough to figure all of this out, the only logical choice would be to permanently quit going to the bathroom. Punishment rarely speeds up house training. Often, it makes the dog nervous or afraid every time it needs to go to the bathroom.

Spontaneous or Submissive Urination

Puppies may spontaneously urinate when excited. This may be when they first see you, at meeting a new dog, or when they are scared. It is often referred to as submissive or excitement urination. Do not discipline the puppy for this, as it is something they cannot control. Simply ignore it and clean up the mess. If you do not overreact, they will usually outgrow this between 4 and 7 months of age.