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Sit Happens

Tips and Techniques with Trudi Thorpe



Photo by Animax

Hi, Trudi,

Hi, I have a 13 week old cocker spaniel puppy who is the most divine puppy in almost every way, she sits perfectly, comes to me when I call her and is soooo sweet, but she's a nightmare when it comes to getting her to pee and poo outside. I've tried everything I can think of to resolve this problem. I've made a loud noise and told her 'No' very sternly EVERY time she's gone in the house, when I've caught her going (usually on the carpet in the bedroom) I've picked her up as quickly as I can, told her 'NO!' and put her outside to make her go there, and I've even tried taking her outside and waiting with her so that I can tell her she's good when she goes, but nothing seems to be working. In fact, on the times when I've gone outside with her, I've waited at least 5 minutes but she never goes, and then almost as soon as we're inside and my back's turned she pees on the carpet just to spite me! We even have an older dog who's about 3yrs old and perfectly toilet trained and I can't understand why she's not just following him when she needs to go. I'm getting desperate now, and if I can't sort this out really soon I may have to think about giving her away as I can't live like this much longer. Pleeeeeease help!!!

Sarah T

Newcastle

Hi Sarah,

Toilet training is one of the first things that you start teaching your puppy and as you are well aware, can also be one of the most frustrating. Eliminating, or going to the toilet in the very spot in which a dog is standing is a natural dog behaviour. We are the ones that want to get rid of that natural dog behaviour and replace it with a complex human behaviour like eliminating in a designated spot.

With toilet training comes a number of very important facts that you need to be aware of. To start, your puppy has absolutely no bladder control until she is around about 4 months old. This means that what goes in one end takes no time at all to come out the other. It is also important to understand that your puppy has absolutely no concept of what a house is, or even that she is in a house, therefore if you reprimand her in any way, shape or form when she eliminates in the wrong spot, she will always associate the reprimand with the fact that she went to the toilet and NOT that she went to the toilet inside the house. That is far too complex for her to be able to work out. Reprimanding her will only make her fearful of going to the toilet in front of you and she will therefore become secretive when she needs to go. She will wait until your back is turned, or go into another room or go behind the couch etc. This is possibly why you are already finding that the minute your back is turned that she pees on the carpet.

It has nothing at all to do with spite, it simply means that she has no idea of what you want her to do, is totally confused, thinks that going to the toilet is a bad thing (even though she can't help it) and is becoming fearful of you. If you find that you are taking your puppy outside and standing out there for a period of time then coming back in only for her to go to the toilet the minute you step back inside the door usually means that you are redirecting her attention when you are out there by either moving around too much, talking to her, being animated or simply just distracting her from

what it is that you want her to do, which is simply just to go to the toilet OUTSIDE! This is why when you come back inside the house and go back to doing your own thing that the puppy suddenly remembers she wants to go to the toilet, so she does!!!

The reason she is picking the carpet is because dogs are very sub-strata or surface conscious. This means that if given the choice, they will pee on carpet, a rug or mat rather than a hard surface like wood or tiles. The most important thing about toilet training your puppy is remembering that is NOT your puppy's responsibility to toilet train herself, it is yours. And by the way, older dogs have extremely good bladder control so there's no way they are going to be able to toilet train your pup.

So, how do you go about doing this? To successfully toilet train your puppy, it is imperative that you have patience, persistence, consistency, understanding and a good sense of humour to help you through this period. Toilet training requires the puppy to understand a concept, and that concept is to go to a designated spot (be it outside in the garden or inside on a piddle pad) when they feel the need to eliminate.

In order to build an association between a full bladder and emptying it in the correct place, you first need to condition this association. This is done through monitoring your puppy and taking her to the spot every time she needs to go. Try not to carry her, but encourage her to walk to where she needs to go to assist in building that association. Particularly concentrate on the times that you KNOW she is going to have to go, like straight after she wakes up from a sleep, after playtime and 10 minutes or so after she eats or drinks. Outside of these times, watch her and take her to her designated spot every hour or hour and a half and just stand there quietly until she goes. Praise her lavishly each time she gets it right. If she has an accident and goes anywhere other than where she is supposed to, DO NOT REPRIMAND - if you find you need to take it out on someone, simply grab a newspaper, roll it up and hit yourself over the head for not monitoring her close enough and then clean it up without fuss. When you are not in a position to monitor your puppy, confine her either in a puppy pen or behind a baby gate in the laundry or the bathroom or just somewhere that is tiled so that if she does go firstly, you know it and secondly, it is easy to clean up.

Toilet training is time consuming but done the right way, it won't be long before your puppy gets the concept and will go in the right spot for the rest of her life.*

***Editors note:** There will also be those times where puppy goes backwards in training. I call this the "whoopsie, I forgot I was housetrained" moment. It can happen at anytime between four and eight months or beyond. It often happens in a really rainy period where pup just goes "nope, not venturing out there in miserable weather". My experience was a piddle in the middle of a tiled floor - but in my haste to usher Scooter out into the wet and windy backyard I smacked into furniture and broke a toe. The floor was a lot quicker to clean up than waiting for a broken toe to mend.

Trudi Thorpe runs a dog behaviour and training company, dogLOGIC, based in Sydney. As Trudi says, "DOGS, DOGS, DOGS... A childhood obsession that I never grew out of." She devises and implements individual behavioural strategies and obedience techniques based on 20 years of studying dog problems and problem dogs.

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