

Transcript:

Canine Housebreaking Challenges Part 1 of 2

Hello, this is Dr. Karen Becker and we're going to talk about Canine Housebreaking Challenges today. Up to 25 percent of dogs end up in shelters because of housebreaking issues. Actually, that same statistic holds true as to why dogs end up in the veterinarian for certain behavior problems. Twenty-five percent of behavior issues in veterinary medicine involve toilet-seating problems.

I decided to make this video because I myself have recently encountered an adult dog that I needed to housebreak. I was driving to work about 3 months ago and I thought I saw a fox in the ditch but it was not a fox, it was a small fuzzy dog. And she's ancient. I shouldn't probably say ancient. She's probably 10 years old. It took me about 30 minutes to catch her because she was very afraid. She came in with mange. She had lots of degenerative changes – bad hips, old lady eyes (she needs reading glasses), and her nails were grown into her pads. She had a lot of medical issues and clearly, she had been homeless for some time. We got her fixed up. We got rid of the parasites and she started spending time around the clinic. We named her Meredith and we like Meredith very much. She's a lovely girl. But Meredith was not housebroken. In fact, Meredith had no clue, I'm not sure Meredith has ever been in a house or in a warm enclosure or dwelling. She has no concept of housebreaking. In fact, she has no concept that she's doing anything wrong. The other issue that we knew off the bat with Meredith is that she had been abused because the minute you raise your voice, like when she squatted to go pee, the minute I brought her to the clinic, my instinct was, "Oh no, honey no!" and me just directing that much energy to her in an attempt to not pee, "No!", she hit the floor and she just cowered in her own urine. So we realized that that approach was not going to work and I thought, if I'm going to housebreak an adult 10-year-old dog, there could be some of you that have rescued dogs or in this exact same dilemma, I want to go over the basic principles of housebreaking a dog.

Principles of Housebreaking a Dog

What I will tell you is that you can housebreak a dog at any age. Obviously, instilling really good habits for puppies is a whole lot easier than housebreaking an adult dog. You can housebreak any dog but it's just much easier to do it with younger dogs. Consistency is very important. Staying positive with your dog and having patience is critical. So, there are some basic principles for housebreaking I want to cover.

No. 1: Never leave your unhousebroken dog unattended. If you cannot engage with that dog, even being in the same room does not count. What I mean is, we would put Meredith up front behind the counter in the reception area. And even though there are up to 4 people in that area at one time, no one was specifically focusing on Meredith and Meredith would pee and that allowed her to fail. We set her up in an environment, where we were trying to watch her. We were all busy and we couldn't watch her and she would fail and pee. That is not her fault, that's our fault for not paying attention to the fact that we were not able to supervise her in that environment. So, if you're not directly interacting with an unhousebroken dog, you cannot leave them unattended even if they're around your area because you set them up to fail. You have to put them in a crate, more on crates in a minute.

Crates are actually a very natural, normal, and instinctual thing for dogs to want to be in for as long as it's not abused or used as punishment. Dogs, by nature, are den-dwelling animals. They want to be in a small, tight, safe, warm, dark bedroom. And if you give dogs an option to have a den, they'll usually take it as long as it's not done in force or in an abusive manner. So if you're absolutely against crate-training your dog, then your option is to literally tether your unhousebroken dog to you. When I say tether, get a clip on the leash and leash the dog to you. The leash should be no longer than 4 feet and everywhere you go, your unhousebroken dog will go with you. That was not going to happen at Natural Pets so we opted for crate-training.

The second premise of housebreaking is you have to feed your dog on a schedule. If you leave down a bowl of food and you're unhousebroken dog is eating a little bit all the time, your unhousebroken dog is going to make poop a little bit all the time, which means, instead of a poop schedule, we know that we feed Meredith twice a day, we know that an hour after breakfast, she's going to have to go poop and an hour after dinner, she's going to have to go poop and we are able to be cued up and ready for those timeframes. If you feed your dog an all-you-can-eat-buffet all day, you'll have a much harder time housebreaking dogs so I really recommend you get your dog on a feeding schedule.

It's very important that you reward your dog for good behavior. Your dog does not speak fluent English and you do not speak fluent 'dog language.' Your dog can read your emotions, like "that's good, that's really good," but your dog doesn't know instinctually that he's supposed to pee in a certain place so it's very important. Most dogs speak the language of food so you're rewarding them – the reward has to come within 3 seconds of the behavior but you're stockpiling your pockets full of good morsels and when they do urinate appropriately outside, you're rewarding them very concisely after appropriate behavior is really important. That's how they begin to recognize "you really get excited when I pee outside" and "yes we do." So we want to make sure that we're reinforcing those good behaviors and there's no better way to reinforce besides food. You don't have to give food forever but you have to give food often

enough until they can exhibit the behavior consistently then you can slowly back up on the food rewards and go to a verbal phase.

Last but not least, you cannot involve punishment. The thought of rubbing your dog's nose in your excrement, I don't even know where that came from but it is inappropriate. If you miss the cue that your dog has to pee – maybe Meredith doesn't give a cue but she just squats _ it is my fault, not hers, and me yelling at her or reprimanding her is not going to.. all that it's going to do is have her fear me - she knows I'm upset and she doesn't know about what. And from a dog's perspective, you're lovely, wonderful and kind to them and every now and then you become bipolar – mean, aggressive, screaming freak who yells at them, especially if they have gone potty or poop, and you come home from work, and they've gone to the bathroom, even at their crate. You cannot punish them for that because they're not able to correlate. They know you're mad, they can correlate that you're angry but they can't correlate the behavior of peeing and pooping inappropriately to your anger because they did this behavior 3 or 4 hours ago. You can't use anger or force.