

Dane Affairs – Housebreaking 101

As usual, I am writing about something near and dear to current events in my personal life. With a new puppy in the house for the first time in three years, I've found that I've had to dust off my puppy raising skills.

What I found interesting is the relative level of challenge with bringing a new puppy into the house versus raising a litter, sending them off to their new homes and then being left with the one or two you have chosen to keep.

Managing one or two puppies after having cared for a litter of six or eight seems marvelously easy compared to a single puppy brought home. Having a litter eases you into the whole process and then when you are on the brink of being totally overwhelmed, they go to new families. Ah, you suddenly have so easy a routine with just the ones you keep.

Housebreaking 101.

My three rules of housebreaking:

1. Positive reinforcement
2. After.....outside
3. Observe carefully

This is how I use these three rules.

With training of any kind, positive reinforcement is critical. In the early stages of training we want to reinforce behavior that is even approaching what we want.

Reinforcement is important to encourage repetition. After a while, we start to be a bit more demanding and only reinforce behavior that is close to what we want and finally, limit the reinforcement to the behavior that hits the mark.

After playing, the puppy goes outside. After eating, the puppy goes outside. After drinking,

the puppy goes outside. After napping, the puppy goes outside. Pretty much after anything, the puppy goes outside.

More than just putting the puppy outside, you go outside with it. You can play, walk around, sit and wait, but above all, observe. Watch what this puppy does. Learn the body language. When the puppy does go, praise with a "good potty!" or "good poo poo!"

Observe very carefully the body language your puppy exhibits just prior to going. It will soon become very apparent just by observation if they have to go and which end is going to produce!

Keep this observational tool in hand as you spend time inside with your puppy. But don't leave the puppy to its own devices, loose in the house. Keep it in an area that you control and can observe.

As soon as you see something that you even think might be body language suggesting something is going to come out of one end or the other, take the puppy outside. There will be many false alarms, but they will prove to be worth it. You are learning to read your puppy and your puppy is developing desirable behaviors. When you see desirable behavior, you have one critical job and that is to praise that behavior! And as they say, timing is everything!

The crate is an invaluable tool in housebreaking a puppy. When the puppy goes in its crate for the night or while you need to work or take care of things without a puppy underfoot, the puppy may just curl up and go to sleep. Then again, it may scream its little head off!

Once in the crate, if the puppy starts to whine, give it some time to settle down. If it doesn't

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settle down, or the intensity of the whining increases, go to the crate. Open the door, pick the puppy up and take it outside. Do not let the puppy walk to the door itself or it may just squat before you can react. Once you have the puppy outside, put it down and encourage it to “go.”

If the puppy has to go, it will. If you are reasonably sure it is not going to go, then it goes back into the crate. You may have to repeat this several times over the course of the first few nights, but they will learn quickly.

When you come home or are done with your activities, without a doubt, the puppy is going to start to make some noise. Take the puppy out of the crate, pick it up and go outside. Put the puppy down and let it take care of business.

Again, when the puppy does go, praise with a “good potty!” or “good poo poo!” Pretty soon, this puppy will know that if it starts whining or crying, guess what? It’s going to go outside! The puppy learns to cue you that it needs to go with this behavior. And, it may also learn “potty” and “poo poo” too! This can be very handy when traveling to shows.

Always, always, always make this a fun, rewarding routine for the puppy. If the puppy has an accident in its crate or in the house, scolding will do you no good. Patience, observation and rewarding desirable behaviors are your tools. If the puppy has accidents in the crate, then reduce the amount of time that you leave the puppy in the crate without a break. Keep old towels and clean up items nearby. Make it easy to manage house training.

An 8 week old puppy is not going to hold it much more than 3 or 4 hours. By the time they are 3 months, they are doing 4-5 hours without

trouble. But as soon as you take that puppy out of the crate – it goes outside. I’m feeding puppies this age lunch, so there is always going to be a noon break anyway.

My weekday routine goes something like this. First thing in the morning, the puppy goes out. I make breakfast for all the dogs. The puppy comes in and everyone gets fed. After breakfast, the puppy goes out. Then it is into the crate for the morning and I’m off to work. I come home at lunch and first thing, the puppy goes out. Lunch gets fed outside and the puppy plays for a while. Then back to the crate.

After work, first thing, the puppy goes out while I make dinner for all the dogs. Everyone gets dinner. The puppy goes out again. We play outside or inside. If we play inside, the puppy goes out frequently. I spend as much time as possible with the puppy and praise lavishly when I get behavior I want.

This new puppy of mine was using a dog door with a 10 inch riser on its own at 10-11 weeks! I didn’t have to even attempt training her. She jumped up on the flap to get my attention, it moved and she figured it out real quick. She hasn’t had an accident inside since.

I’ve got a 4 year old that won’t go through that flap to save his life! I’ve tried every positive motivator I can think of and the more he thinks I want him to go through it, the more determined he is to insist I open the people door for him. Maybe I can get my 3 month old puppy to teach him. 😊