

How To Potty Train Your Dog More Effectively

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An Approach to Housetraining an Adult Dog

Bringing an adult dog into your home demands as much effort from you and the family as does a puppy. It's a mistake to think that just because the dog is full-grown and may have been potty trained in *one* home, that he'll just immediately adjust to your home's elimination schedule, too.

That's not realistic. The dog has many adjustments to his new environment and doesn't instinctively know that you don't allow peeing on the floor – especially his prior owner didn't mind or didn't seem to care.

Don't make the mistake of assuming that because he's an adult dog that he'll just “know” what to do. Start with him as if he were a puppy and gradually teach him the routine of your home's pet potty schedule.

You probably need to start with crate training or restriction to a bathroom. Then set a schedule for potty breaks. Adult dogs are very picky about finding a potty place outside that's apart from where they play, just as they don't like to potty near where they sleep or eat.

Help him find that place in your yard or outside when walking and return him there for subsequent potty breaks. You have to monitor the potty breaks for several weeks to learn your dog's elimination patterns.

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You also have to set morning and evening feeding times. He may not have had such an organized life schedule, so this could take time for adjustment. Don't believe that old saying, 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks.' It's not the age of the dog that matters - it's the consistency of the owner.

If your dog came from an abusive home, even if it was just filled with shouting and hitting with paper for any accidents, then your training efforts may take longer. First you have to win the dog's confidence and understand that he needs time to get comfortable in his new home.

There will be accidents, so be prepared to clean it up and move forward. Don't assume that an adult dog will be any easier to train than a puppy. Both dogs would face the same adjustment issues. You have to train with consistency and affection so that you reinforce the responses that you want repeated.

An older male dog may be accustomed to marking his territory by urinating on it. This is an instinctive behavior for male dogs - you aren't going to break him of it without breaking his spirit or having him neutered.

Consistency Is Key with Houstraining

There are very few dogs that can't be houstrained - just poor pet owners who don't understand the value of consistency. You're the most important element in successful houstraining for a puppy or adult dog that's new in your home.

The dog is looking to you to set boundaries and rules, while also showing that he's welcome in your world. Houstraining might take a few days – or it might take months – each dog is different.

It takes at least several weeks or a few months to establish houstraining with a puppy. Some owners say that puppies are easier to train, since they have no negative experiences to counteract.

Other owners insist that an older dog is easier to train because they have better developed bladders, can wait longer between breaks and know something about houstraining. It doesn't matter which is right or wrong, it's only about dealing with the dog *you* have in the most positive way so that you're teaching a good lesson, not instilling fear.

The old method of housebreaking was punishment centered - hitting a puppy with rolled up paper to make him stop having accidents and then punishing him again because he urinated on the floor instead of the newspaper.

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Needless to say, it rarely got the desired behavior. Positive reinforcement shows the puppy exactly what you want him to do by rewarding the potty behavior with praise and affection.

These are far more powerful motivators for your dog than punishment. If your dog senses that you're going to be home soon, he will make every effort to wait for the potty break. But if you're home on time one day, late the next and later the following day, then your dog is smart enough to give up and go when he has to. That's not his choice - particularly if he's in a crate because he dislikes combining his potty with his personal space.

Losing that consistency will cause him to give up and go against his instinct to potty in separate place. Housetraining takes time, so you need to be prepared to schedule yourself for this task until it's complete.

That's going to interrupt your schedule and cause you to watch the clock. If you'll make this sacrifice for the weeks needed to train your dog, then you'll be done with the process completely.

This is a small price to pay for a housetrained, well-adjusted dog that will live comfortably in your home for many years. At the end of the training period, you aren't a screaming wreck and your dog isn't cowering under furniture at the sound of your voice. Effective training builds a lasting bond with your dog.

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Crate Training Is the Most Common Potty Training Approach for Pups

Placing a puppy in a crate may sound restrictive and unkind, but when used positively, it can be effective for housetraining. By nature, dogs don't like to potty in the same place that they sleep or eat.

Now you know why the newspaper you put in the kitchen next to the dog bowls isn't as appealing for a potty as your living room carpet. Crate training only gets the desired response if done when you're at home and supervising the time limits.

Confining a puppy in a crate while you're at work all day defeats the purpose. Unable to hold the urine, the puppy will potty in the crate and lose that natural instinct to separate the potty place from sleeping and eating spots.

By keeping the puppy in the crate for limited time, when you release him, he'll be ready and willing to potty where *you* say to go. That's when you want to be ready to take the puppy outside or bring him to the location where you have potty paper.

If the puppy soils inside the crate, make sure you clean it up before returning the puppy to the crate. Otherwise, you will set back your housetraining efforts. You have to be consistent in the times that you take the puppy out for a potty break.

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With a puppy, don't go longer than an hour and half to two hours at the most so you can reinforce that going to the potty happens in a certain location, not just anywhere. If the dog quickly does his business, reward him enthusiastically with praise.

You may add a food treat – however, it's a good idea to offer different reinforcements for specific activities. Doggy cookies are great, but your affection and approval is by far the reward that your dog wants the most.

Unless you have a fenced yard, you can also use these frequent potty breaks to reinforce walking on the leash. Don't roam aimlessly during potty breaks. Give the dog five minutes to do the job, and then go back inside.

That will teach the dog that casual walks are just for fun, but potty walks are short and purposeful. You'll be glad you taught that lesson when the dog wakes you up at 3 o'clock in the morning in a desperate need to potty when the outside temperature is freezing.

To help you monitor the crate training, keep a log of times your dog spends in the crate and how often you take the dog out. In the beginning, you may need to take the dog out every 45 minutes to an hour for short breaks.

When you find that this is working, extend the time by 15-20 minutes each period. In a few weeks, you'll learn the times of day the dog most commonly needs to potty and how long he can wait between breaks.

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Don't punish him for having accidents. Simply revise the training schedule to shorten the time between potty breaks. If your dog fails to potty after several breaks, be smart and restrict his access to a kitchen or bathroom.

You don't want a dog with a full bladder to start active play or get excited. Those distractions often result in accidents. After a successful potty break, you can give full run of the house as an additional reward. This will train the dog to see that after potty, he gets to have fun with the family, which is another reward.

Cruel House Training Tactics Are Out

If you bring home a puppy, be prepared to deal with accidents during the potty training phase. It's shocking the way people use abusive tactics to stop a puppy from doing what comes naturally.

Puppies are no more prepared to be instantly potty trained than human infants are. A period of development needs to be reached before the puppy is ready to follow your requests and commands.

The puppy desperately wants to please you and doesn't understand why he's being punished. The old views of punishment as a means of potty training are as outdated for dogs as they are for children. It simply doesn't work.

Rubbing a puppy's nose in the feces isn't a good approach. The dog only sees you as a tormentor and doesn't understand what you *do* want instead. There is a very real risk of serious illness to the puppy after getting a nose full of E-coli bacteria. If you're unhappy with the cost of having your rug cleaned, wait until you see the vet bill from an illness you caused!

Another type of fear-based potty training is to swat the dog with a rolled up newspaper after rubbing his nose in the feces. If the puppy could speak, he would say, "What makes you think I'm going to potty on newspaper in the kitchen after you hit me with it? I don't want anything to do with newspaper!" Hitting a puppy with rolled up newspaper

merely teaches him to fear newspaper. You simply have to accept that a puppy will make mistakes. Sometimes, you're responsible for those mistakes. When you arrive home late or sleep in rather than taking the puppy outside, what do you expect him to do?

Don't punish the puppy because you changed the schedule. If you want to get the puppy accustomed to a morning and afternoon walking regimen, then you have to be consistent. You also have to respond when the puppy shows signs of discomfort, irritation or other means of trying to get your attention.

If he needs to go out, be fair. Don't you have days when your potty breaks are more frequent and sudden? What if you had an intense need to potty but your boss demanded that you sit through an hour-long meeting?

Be careful when training a puppy that you teach positive skills rather than instill fear at how mean you are. Too often the dog owner's frustration simply teaches a puppy to stay away. If a dog becomes mean, chances are he learned it from a mean spirited owner.

A puppy's world is playful, enthusiastic and adventure-filled. Sometimes chasing down that rubber ball is so intense that he forgets about going to the potty until his little bladder can't wait any longer and there's an accident. It wasn't on purpose, so be careful how you respond. A puppy with a broken spirit learns to watch for an open door to run away and never return.

Don't Let Your Puppy Get Used to Making Messes

When it comes to reducing household messes, your puppy can be easier to houstrain than a teenager. That's because a puppy - by nature - can't stand to live in the same area with his messes.

You can use that instinct to houstrain your puppy with minimal distress for both of you. A puppy that comes into your home directly from the breeder has adjustments that you have to consider.

Not only is the puppy in a strange environment, but he's been taken from his mother and siblings. Where there were lots of little barks and playful activity among other puppies, he is now an "only dog" in a home where he must wait for your time and attention.

If your home is filled with children, then the puppy can actually be overwhelmed with attention and not enough time to rest. Be mindful that your little puppy has many adjustments to make in becoming part of your home and family.

If you're crate training your puppy, everyone in the home needs to agree that this job is under the control of one person – or at least kept on a schedule. Otherwise, the whimpering puppy in the crate might be released by a well-

meaning child (or another adult) and suddenly, there's a mess on the floor.

Worse still is to wake up in the predawn hours of the morning to take the puppy out for a break, only to have to go looking for the puppy. Someone weakened and put the puppy in the bed. Unfortunately, the puppy needs to potty and the next pillow is as good as anyplace. Lesson learned - at least the lesson for the *owners*.

You may have to train the family at the same time you are training the puppy. Explain how the dog's instinct is to avoid doing potty business where he sleeps and eats. That's why crate training is a kind of aversion therapy - so that the puppy will want to hold it until he's taken outside for official potty time.

Then make sure that you don't let your puppy spend time in his own mess inside the crate. If you constantly interrupt the housetraining routine, your puppy learns that you're not dependable and he accepts living in mess.

Once that happens, you lose weeks' worth of effort. So take advantage of the puppy's instinct for separating his life functions. Who knows - maybe this will rub off on your teenager!

Don't Scold, But Use Positive Reinforcement Instead

Have you ever noticed that as soon as you start fussing, your puppy hangs his little head and tucks his tail between his legs in despair? He knows you're upset and has no idea what to do about it.

If it's because of his "accident" on the floor, he's really confused. He had to potty and you weren't there to take him out - or you were too busy on the computer to stop and notice his needs.

At some point his bladder couldn't take it anymore and now he has your attention, but in a negative way. Scolding a puppy (or even an adult dog) that is new to your home for accidents is useless.

All you're teaching is that you have a short temper and your love is conditional. You don't show what you want him to do, so nothing is learned. Positive reinforcement focuses on teaching what you *want* the puppy to do instead of shouting about what you *don't* want.

With positive reinforcement, the puppy makes the association between what he just did and your praise. Since he desperately wants to please you, he tries to do it again for your approval.

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With each reinforcement, the behavior becomes more and more automatic so the housetraining takes hold. Accidents happen - even to a dog that's housetrained. Upsets in the routine, visitors, home remodeling, and holiday schedules are just a few times that can cause your dog to be confused about what's expected.

When you find an accident, clean it up. Never rub his nose in it or scold him verbally. If your dog seems to go to a certain place, like a lesser-used dining room to potty, then restrict access to that room by closing the door or putting up a child's gate.

If your dog has recently been left at a kennel for days or weeks, you may need to repeat the earlier crate training and provide more frequent potty breaks. Do as you did when he was a puppy and make a chart of these breaks so that you can predict the dog's elimination patterns and intentionally time his breaks closer to them.

Your dog depends on you to give him the potty opportunity when he needs it. Your dog will go when he needs to, so make sure his potty break meets those times. When accidents look like diarrhea, your dog is having stomach upset not trying to defy you.

Don't punish him for what he can't prevent. Check the dog food. Is it out of date? Have you left dog food out for several hours? That can be a food danger. Make sure that no one in the family is feeding table scraps or junk food to the dog.

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These are not suitable for the dog and can easily lead to stomach upset. Just as with humans, diarrhea or other sudden change in bowel habits can mean that your dog has a medical problem. You'll feel horribly guilty if you scold your dog, only to learn he couldn't control the potty problem.

Housebreaking Versus Houstraining

Housebreaking a puppy starts with the wrong premise – breaking. It's as if you want to make the puppy stop being a puppy and function like a perfect little toy. That's neither fair nor realistic.

A pet owner who wants to establish a positive relationship with the pet is focused on *houstraining*. This approach shows the puppy how to live comfortably in your environment.

Forget the old school methods that teach you to start paper training and swatting a puppy the first day it's home. Whether you bring home a puppy or an adult dog, you're taking this animal from the environment it knows and going into an environment that's totally foreign to it.

The dog has no idea what room is okay to go in and what room is off limits. A shelter dog or crated puppy is so excited to have space to walk and freedom to roam that your home is a virtual theme park of wonders. Add to that the presence of other pets or children and the excitement is almost too much to contain.

Houstraining takes a lot of your time. You need to work with your dog in every room. If the living room is off limits and you notice him sniffing for a place to potty, then gently pick him up, say "No" firmly without shouting, and then place him on the floor of the kitchen with his newspapers or take him outside.

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You may have to do that dozens of times until he gets the message, but it will happen. Make sure you balance the “no-no” spaces with the “yes” spaces. Once your dog has learned the essential house rules for potty zones, you still have to allow for the unexpected.

A dog, particularly a puppy, who is alone and frightened by a thunderstorm or other loud noises may have a potty accident. Or there may be a medical issue that requires your attention. Like humans, dogs can get urinary tract infections that make bladder control difficult.

A sudden change in potty training levels can be a cue that your dog’s behavior change is from a physical problem, not defiance. As your dog ages, bladder control will fail just as it does for many aging humans.

Any drastic change in routine can get your dog off his potty training path to success, too. Visiting relatives, home remodeling or emotional distress are all factors that can cause a dog to be lax in housetraining.

Think about what’s going on around the home as possible reasons why the dog is feeling confused about what’s happening around him and responding erratically. Restore order as you patiently go back and reinforce housetraining in positive ways.

Potty Training for Small Dogs

Granted, small dogs can only make small messes. But you'll pay the same carpet cleaning costs to do the room with urine stains whether it's made by a Chihuahua or a Doberman. Small dogs need the same potty training basics as any dog.

You have to remember that their size might work against them in that their tiny bladders won't hold as much (or for as long) if you're late coming home for their potty break. Small dogs don't mind living in apartments or homes without big yards. They only need a little spot to do their business, so a flowerbed might be enough room.

Some people make fun of little dogs in their knit sweaters, but it's more than just a fashion statement. During the winter months in cold climates, the change from heated indoors to freezing outdoors is very harsh on a small dog's body.

The sudden chill can also distract them from the potty business and cause them to run back inside. Once warm again, the urge hits and there's nowhere to go but the rug. You can make this easier on your small dog by getting him a warm sweater for cold weather.

Some small dogs will not budge off their hind legs until they see the sweater in your hands. Your small dog may totally refuse to go outdoors in rain or cold, even with a

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sweater on. You have to plan options. Perhaps you can keep a papered box in the garage as a backup potty during bad weather. Only use this for limited times during the year so that you don't discourage the dog from going outside to his regular potty spots.

If your small dog goes outdoors in a yard or in the park, be alert as to where he's walking. Keep your dog away from tall grass or bushes. While he's busy trying to sniff out the right spot, he's easy prey for snakes in tall grass.

Owners of small dogs can become insensitive to their neighbors. Just because the feces is small, it's still dog poop. Pick it up - your neighbor didn't contract with you for fertilizer.

Not to mention that dog poop on their shoes may not be visible until it's tracked onto the carpet. That won't win you an invitation to the neighbor's next bar-b-q. It's your responsibility to clean up after your dog. Don't try to get out of it by arguing that it's so small it doesn't matter. It matters to anyone who doesn't own it.

Housetraining for small dogs is the same as for large dogs. You can begin with crate training and frequent breaks until a routine is established. Some small dogs can be temperamental because many are spoiled lap dogs. That's where the positive reinforcement of your praise and affection is even stronger - when it's so important to your dog to please you.

Setting a Schedule for Your Dog's Elimination

As you housetrain your dog, you have to set up a schedule. Your dog isn't going to do that for himself. It takes your effort and monitoring for several weeks to a few months for this to occur, so that your dog learns a routine.

You can help your dog know when it's the right time to go potty by repeating that routine consistently. When most people wake up, they usually go to the bathroom soon afterwards.

Well, your dog needs the same courtesy. Don't stop to make coffee or check the newspaper - take your dog out as soon as you're up and moving. He's been holding it all night, so don't make this difficult.

Keep the first potty break short, and then bring him inside for breakfast. Let your dog eat breakfast while you're getting dressed and ready for the day. By the time you finish your coffee and breakfast, you can take the dog out for a potty break.

If he's had some time to eat and let the food settle, he'll be ready for elimination before going into the crate or the room where he spends the day. With a puppy, you need to come back for a mid-day potty break and a mid-afternoon break if possible.

When you're at work, let another family member or willing neighbor handle those breaks for you. Just make sure

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everyone knows and follows the routine you use for breaks. Make the breaks short (5-10 minutes) and don't mix playtime with potty time. Your dog needs to clearly understand the difference and he will - if you're consistent.

Keep the same routine for dinnertime. Let your dog out for a potty break as soon as you return home from work or school. Set a time to feed the dog and don't get more than thirty minutes off schedule.

It's better to feed the dog early in the evening, so that the food digests and he's ready for an elimination break before bedtime. Then follow the same procedure that you do in the morning.

As you're housetraining your dog, keep notes of the times. You can even create a simple checklist to post on the refrigerator. Then anyone who feeds the dog or takes him for potty breaks can make note of the time. This is helpful in noticing what the dog's natural elimination patterns are.

When your dog completes his potty break, remember to give him praise and affection. You can offer a dog biscuit, but it's not necessary. He's just as happy with your approval. Instead of the old training methods that punish a dog for making a mess in the house, you take the more effective positive approach to show him approval for getting the job done during a scheduled potty break.

Since your dog wants you to love him, he will be willing to try his best to please you. Just don't make it difficult. If

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you're running late and miss his potty break, clean it up and get back on track without scolding him. Your dog depends on you for many things, including staying on target for potty breaks. He doesn't want to mess in his space - or in yours - so help him do the right thing by sticking to a routine.

The Leash and Crate Mix

Most dogs lack the opportunity to roam a large backyard at will. They're more likely to spend the day indoors while their family members are away at work and school. This can make sticking to a potty training schedule more difficult.

A combination of crate and leash training works for some dogs. If the adult dog is new to your family or returning home after time in a kennel while you were away, you may have to reinforce his potty training.

One option is to return him to the crate during the day and possibly use a leash that's not overly restrictive when you're present so that he stays in one area of the home. Keeping the dog contained 100% of the time isn't the total answer - it's merely part of the process.

Start as you would with a puppy and set up regular potty breaks. Make sure that you time the elimination breaks with enough time after feeding so the dog can do something meaningful on the trip outside.

Spend the weekend closely observing him on the leash whenever he's out of the crate so that you begin to recognize the signs that he needs to potty. He may shake, sniff around, act agitated or start to squat. Those are your signals to stop what you're doing and immediately take him to potty.

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Remember to praise him lavishly when he does his business during the potty break. That's the positive reinforcement needed to show your dog where he's supposed to do his business.

If, during your absence, your dog stayed in a kennel where he eliminated, ate and slept in the same area, then he may have lost his earlier training. He's also probably very depressed and dejected.

Dogs don't like to mix potty with living space anymore than you want to eliminate on the floor in your kitchen. So he needs to start again and build up confidence in his potty skills and in the willingness of the adult on duty to take him out when he needs to go.

An older dog probably has better bladder control than a puppy, so he can usually go longer periods between potty breaks. However, your dog may have a urinary tract infection, diarrhea or other medical problem that's the real cause of his accidents.

If you see a noticeable change in your dog's potty behaviors and there are no other apparent reasons for it, then you want get him checked at the vet. The potty problems may be a symptom of a greater problem.

During the time he's being treated for the medical condition, go easy on the potty training. Your dog needs to feel well and be reasonably able to manage his urine and elimination so that he can cooperate with your training.

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Keep him on a leash when he's not in the crate and carefully care for him by helping notice signs that he needs to potty while he recovers.

Watch Your Dog's Diet During the Houstraining Process

As your dog is learning to follow a potty break routine, you have to avoid doing anything that makes the lessons harder. One way you can help this process is in managing the dog's food intake.

As you monitor and log the crate time and potty breaks, you'll notice a pattern in your dog's elimination. Make sure that the food you provide and the timing of feedings don't compromise training.

Feed your dog at the same time each day. If you feed him in the morning before leaving for work, put out the food as soon as you wake up. The dog can eat and begin to digest the food while you're getting dressed and having your breakfast.

Then the dog will be ready to potty before you leave. Never leave the dog food out all day. If your dog (especially a puppy) eats gradually all day long without a potty break, you're asking for an accident to happen.

For crate training a puppy, make sure there's a supply of water in a container that won't tip. Also leave a few small dog biscuits or treats in case he gets hungry during the day - but don't leave a full meal.

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When you get home, take the dog out and then feed him. Don't wait until late evening to feed dinner to the puppy or you'll be cleaning up feces in the crate or on the rug. Allow a reasonable time for the digestion to occur.

No matter how much the dog begs, don't give table scraps or snack foods. These are not well tolerated by most dogs and some snack foods can be harmful to the dog (and not so great for you either).

Just because a dog will eat what you give him in food scraps doesn't mean it's suitable for him. Feeding him the wrong kind of foods is likely to result in doggie diarrhea. If you don't give your dog the non-nutrient snacks and junk that you eat, he won't develop a taste for it - which is definitely better for everyone in the long run.

High quality dog food is made with added nutrients and designed for the age and weight of your dog. If you're on a budget, find a place to skimp besides your dog food budget. Cheap dog foods can contain ingredients that cause stomach upset and have minimal nutritional value, so your dog may get fat but doesn't grow and thrive.

If your dog gets diarrhea (even from high quality foods), check with your vet. There may be an ingredient in the food that doesn't interact well with your dog's digestive system. Ask the vet for a recommendation. If the next high quality food gets the same results, then your dog may have an internal illness or food allergy that the vet can diagnose.

What If You Don't Want to Crate Train?

You might think that crates are great for shipping cargo, but that dogs are living creatures who deserve better than that. To you, bringing a dog into your home is adding to your family.

It's not a toy to put in the crate while you're busy and take out a few hours when you have time. You believe that's not fair to the dog. Crate training may be a popular method for housetraining, but you don't have to do this to successfully train your dog.

As you're training the dog to wait between potty breaks or until you return home, you can isolate him in a smaller area. A bathroom, laundry room or tiled kitchen is a good choice. The room needs to have an easy to clean floor.

Either close the door or add a baby gate. When you're at home, use the baby gate so that you can observe the dog and so that he doesn't feel punished by being away from you. You can also watch for the physical signs that he needs a potty break.

Dogs have their own signature moves - some seem agitated, restless or shake when they need to have a break. Others sniff in a circle and begin squatting when the time comes. You still need to follow the same approach for establishing a regular feeding schedule and follow-up with potty breaks.

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When you come home to take the dog out to go potty, put the leash on him and head directly outside. Don't let him run around the house celebrating his freedom. In his excitement, he'll leave a puddle on the rug - not because he's mad at you, but because his enthusiasm overcame his bladder control.

Crate training advocates insist that this is the best and fastest way to housetrain a dog. Opponents totally disagree, countering that the difference of a few weeks is nothing compared to having a well-adjusted dog that feels like a member of the family rather than a prisoner of war most of the day.

If your dog is in a small room, he probably has far more space than in a crate. He also has a tall ceiling above him, so he feels free and happy. He can designate a spot in the room for an emergency potty and still have room to get away from it.

Your dog is going to be a member of your family for many years. So what if it takes a little longer to housetrain him? You may have to use the small room training location for nights until he's old enough or well trained enough to wait until morning to go potty.

This isn't the time to weaken and put him in your bed. You'll both wake up in a chilly puddle. Give him time to adjust to the training, and then you can welcome him to a soft bed in your room, or surrender the extra pillow if you choose.

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