

HOUSE TRAINING

Or: “Oops, I Did It Again!”

By
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House training is a concern faced by every dog owner, whether the dog is a brand new baby puppy or an adult dog who has been re-homed for some reason. Let's look at a systematic approach to the problem, and to solving it, that will lead to a happier (and cleaner) home for you and your dog.

All new dog owners have to deal with this issue, and it's unfair to any dog (no matter how reliable they may have been in their past situation) to expect them to be neat, clean and totally trained in a new home. In fact, to be fair to the dog, and kind to oneself, all new owners should consider their new companion as an empty slate in the house training department. Never assume that the dog is going to be easy to train. Never expect too much from him. Your new friend is confused, uncertain, and will need gentle training and guidance to learn to become a clean and well adjusted family member. Instead of thinking of the dog as an adult who “should know better”, always assume that your new Saluki is, emotionally, a puppy ... because in many ways, this is exactly how he will feel and behave.

Many rescue dogs have been moved from place to place ... shelters, foster homes, transport stops ... before finally landing in their new forever home. The confusion this leads to in their minds, the uncertainty in their hearts, will often result in them forgetting all they have previously learned about appropriate potty behavior. When your new dog comes into your home, assume that he knows nothing ... and treat him as you would a brand new puppy. Be totally forgiving -- he is not soiling your carpet out of spite or stupidity, he just doesn't know what is proper, and it's up to you to teach him. If you become frustrated or impatient with anyone, make sure it's yourself, because you can't expect the dog to know what you want ... and where you want it ... until you have done your job of communicating that information to him. That communication takes time, training, and lots and lots of patience.

At STOLA, we are proponents of positive training methods rather than the old “punish the offender” routine. Positive training means focusing on what the dog does right, and making sure you reward every step in the right direction. Positive training means, instead of punishing mistakes, management and control of the dog's environment to make sure that he doesn't have the opportunity to make those mistakes. This means that you will have to always supervise his actions and movements. A lot of work? Yes, it is, but it's worth it, and the only way of looking at the house training issue that is fair to the dog.

Key Components of House Training

Restrict His Freedom

No untrained (or uncertain of training) dog should ever be allowed unrestricted movement in a new home. Ever. This is an absolute essential rule to follow. This means that the dog should never, under any circumstances, be out of your sight until you know for a fact that his training is reliable and he fully understands the what, where, why and how of your expectations. If a new dog is allowed to be out of your sight while you are home, or allowed complete freedom when you are not home, and he soils in the house, the fault lies not with the dog, but with his owner. Freedom should only be given in small increments as the dog proves himself reliable in each new situation. Always make sure the dog is in the room with you (at the very least) when you are home. Baby gates and other barricades can be used to close off areas of the house to make sure he can't get out of your sight. If you are always with him, you have closed off the opportunity for the dog to have an accident while unattended. **The most common reason for house training problems, bar none, is that the owner makes the mistake of giving the dog too much freedom too soon.**

There are a number of good ways to retain the control you must have over the dog's movements.

Crates

One very important and effective tool is the training crate. These come in wire or plastic (airline) varieties, and should be large enough for the dog to move about and stand comfortably. Most of my dogs have preferred the wire crates, as they can see what is going on around them, and don't feel isolated in them. Some dogs, though, prefer the coziness of the more enclosed airline type crate. Situate the crate in a place that is close to the family -- some people even get two crates, one for the family room and one in the bedroom at night so the dog will not feel isolated.

Some people feel a crate is too restrictive, but many dog owners and trainers disagree. The vast majority of dogs, if introduced and trained to the crate in a positive manner, come to see the crate as their bed or den, and will choose to sleep and rest there even with the door left open. That said, crates should not be used as an excuse not to have to deal with the dog, or as a punishment, or as a long-term "cage". Dogs are not "cage pets", and the crate should always be viewed as a tool for training and safety and used appropriately. Leaving a dog for many hours unattended in a crate can be viewed as abuse of the tool, as well as the dog. When you are not home, such as during long work days, be sure to allow your dog a nice break from his crate every three to four hours. A trusted neighbor or professional dog walker or pet sitter can be brought in to assist if you can not get home during breaks.

There is a tried and true method of house training using the crate that involves a careful schedule of feeding and exercise, using the crate in between so that the dog does not have the opportunity to make mistakes in the house (thereby self-reinforcing the wrong behavior ... they don't call it "relieving oneself" for nothing). If used properly, the most restrictive portion of the training regime should only last for a short while, as the dog will quickly come to associate "outside" as the proper and only place to go potty. There are many books and videos on the market which outline the method in detail, so I will only give a brief overview here.

The crate is used whenever the dog is inside unattended (meaning not receiving the owner's full attention). Whenever the door of the crate is opened, the dog is taken outside, treats and praise at the ready, and not allowed inside until after he has eliminated. This is one key issue that many people over-look -- expect to spend a long time at first waiting for the dog to "go", and make sure you don't bring him in too soon. Work from day one on training a cue (see below) that will help speed up the process -- once he starts to get the idea, the long waits will diminish. Have patience. Enthusiastic praise (throw a potty-party!) and treats should be given as soon as the dog does his business, and then he can come inside (empty, hoorah!) and have play and freedom (always supervised) time. The freedom time is increased in gradual increments as the owner becomes certain that the dog is catching on to the proper way to deal with his bodily functions. To assist in the training, as well as the acceptance of the crate, meals are fed on a strict schedule, and the dog eats in his crate. After eating, plenty of opportunity to empty himself in the proper place is always given. Water is also scheduled at first, and withheld after a certain hour at night, to help the dog to get through the night comfortably.

Using crate training for house breaking has proven successful for thousands of dog owners, and often is the fastest and most reliable method.

Exercise Pens

For those owners who just can't get past the misconception that the crate is too constrictive, there is always the option of purchasing an exercise pen (x-pen) instead. These can be purchased at most large pet or feed supply places, and from many online sources. The Sit-Stay Store (<http://www.sitstay.com>) is one online source that has x-pens for a very good price. For a Saluki, you will want a four foot tall pen, and will need to set it up in an area that is easy to clean and in a way that there is nothing in the pen for the dog to use as leverage to escape (alternately, some x-pens can be purchased with tops). They require more room than a crate, but also give the dog more room to move about. Other than that, they are used similarly to the crate for training. They also make very good "safe havens" for the dog when the owner is not at home. They not only keep the house clean, but keep the dog safe from the many dangers he can encounter when unsupervised. Do be aware that, since there is more room for the dog, there is also more room for the occasional "accident" to occur if you choose to use an x-pen.

Either a crate or an x-pen can be a valuable tool for keeping the dog confined when you are not at home. When you are home, there are other methods of supervising him that might work out better for you. The key is to never let him out of your sight while you are there, and to eliminate the opportunity for accidents (and self-injury) when you are away.

The Waist Leash

For some families and for a small number of dogs, the x-pen/crate method does not turn out to be the right training method. However, even in those cases, the cause is not lost. One of my own Salukis was such a dog, and in order to house train her, I tied her to my waist on a long leash. That way she could never wander too far away from me, and I was always aware when

she began to sniff, circle, or otherwise act like she had to go outside. At first it seemed like we were running out the door every hour ... but after a while she began to understand the routine and respond to the praise, and we could start to gradually allow her more freedom. This is a very good method for dogs who have an owner who is home most of the time.

Praise and Reinforcement

Now that the first half of the equation is understood (restricting the dog's freedom and making sure he is always, under all situations, supervised), the second half must be considered: reinforcing the right behavior.

For a while, possibly a long while with some dogs, the dog should never go outdoors to potty without a human by his side. You, human, are there for one purpose -- to communicate clearly to the dog that he is doing his thing in the right place. This is not something that a dog will fully understand overnight, so it's a practice that you must be consistent with until you are absolutely certain he understands. He'll demonstrate that understanding by going longer and longer periods without accidents, and by holding his needs till you can get him outside. He'll also illustrate by the fact that he immediately moves his bladder and/or bowels when brought to the assigned spot.

You, as the guide and mentor, must be absolutely consistent with your praise. You must make a big, happy, deal every single time he goes potty outside. Dogs, being opportunistic creatures, respond greatly to praise ... but even more strongly to food. Don't be shy of giving him a tiny treat with your praise -- little bits of cheese, pinky-nail sized bits of chewy dog treats, even tiny pieces of dry cat food, will be just enough yummy flavor to communicate your pleasure, and make him want more (and don't be insulted that he responds to the cookie more strongly than your voice praise and petting ... it doesn't mean he doesn't love you, it just mean's he's a dog!). Dogs quickly figure out just what it is they are doing that makes you pop that goody into their mouths. It won't take long for him to associate the praise and treat with the piddle in the grass, and once that happens you're well on your way in the right direction!

Many dog owners find it easiest to control the praise-and-treat timing if their dog is on a leash. I've trained several Salukis in this way ... and gotten my own share of exercise as a bonus (okay, we have to find *something* positive about trekking out into a cold winter night with a half-trained dog on a leash, don't we?) I do recommend leash-assisted potty training for the reason of timing, as well as control (many's the dog who will take a shortcut and pee on the porch if it's raining out rather than sloshing all the way to his usual grassy patch). This may not work for everyone, but I've found that training progresses much more quickly if you can be right at the dog's side, and in control of the details of the situation, with the help of a leash (even when the yard is fenced). Just keep reminding yourself that this phase is only temporary. (And you might want to keep rewards for yourself in the other pocket -- just don't confuse the Hershey's Kisses with the Liver Treats. That wouldn't be good for either of you!)

To assist in the whole process, take him to a consistent spot, always the same place, each time he goes outside. Even if you go for a long walk on the leash, don't assume he's empty on bringing him back inside till you've taken him back to "his potty place" and encouraged him to go (again,

that cue word mentioned below will help). Dogs don't generalize very well, and it will be up to you to use control, praise, and the cue word to help him to learn that his training applies wherever he goes. But at first, reduce his confusion by using one special spot as his toilet.

Potty On Cue

One trick that is a very good aid to speeding up the training process is teaching the dog to go potty on cue. My own are all trained to "get busy". Many people use "go potty" or "do your business". Some people like to choose a separate signal for urination and bowel movements. That can be helpful when your canine friend has already urinated, and you know in your heart that he also has to poop but is too busy chasing the butterflies! Whatever cue works best for you, choose it and stick with it, and use it every time the dog does his thing. As soon as you see him squat, crouch or lift, give the cue, "Go Potty, Max!", and then praise and treat. Very soon he will associate the words with the deed, and you'll see that he's going in response to the words rather than the other way around.

Having a well-trained potty cue is a great help on those cold winter nights when you really want to get the task over with quickly! It also helps tremendously when traveling ... many dogs are reluctant to go in a strange place or on a strange surface.

Wrapping It Up

So now you have your dog under control and supervised, you are restricting his freedom and only increasing it in increments as he proves himself trustworthy, you have a pocket full of treats and a voice cue to train him to, you've got your leash and slippers (or galoshes as needs be) at the ready.... You're all set to house train that new Saluki, right? Wrong. There's one more essential component you need to finish the equation, and it's the most important one.

Patience.

Remember that things don't happen over night. Each dog is an individual, each learns in his own way and at his own pace. Be patient and consistent, however, and you will eventually come to a place where you realize there haven't been any accidents in a long, long time, your dog has gradually earned the freedom of the whole house (or the portion which you wanted him to roam to start with), and he's gone outside consistently and reliably (and even on cue) for longer than not. You'll be able to say that you have a house-trained Saluki at that point. Be kind to yourself, and to your dog, and allow for the time and gradual understanding that may be necessary to get there.

In the meanwhile, there is more learning that you can do, as you are getting ready to teach him. Following are some books and other resources that can help you along the way. They all are positive-reinforcement based, and cover affection training, clicker training, and other types of positive and operant conditioning methods. These positive methods have proven to not only help raise a well behaved dog ... but a happy friend and companion.

Helpful Books, Videos and Other Resources

Saluki Secrets by Cherie Fehrman

A special book about Salukis, particularly rescues, and the challenges and joys a new owner will face as they try to help their new friend settle into their home.

Only Angels by Cherie Fehrman

A sequel to *Saluki Secrets* that concentrates in more detail on Affection Training and teaching the Saluki specific behaviors, as well as many other resources helpful to the new Saluki owner.

[*Saluki Secrets* and *Only Angels* are included in the adoption package for all new STOLA Saluki adoptors, as well as available on the <http://www.stola.org> website Store pages.]

Sirius Puppy Training by Dr Ian Dunbar

Dr Dunbar has been a fore-runner in the movement toward positive dog training techniques and has books, videos and classes based on his methods that can be helpful to all dog owners.

Don't Shoot the Dog by Karen Pryor

The ultimate book on operant conditioning (positive reinforcement training) that goes in depth into the theory behind the methods, and is a great help to anyone wishing to understand how positive conditioning works.

The Culture Clash by Jean Donaldson

A very interesting book that dwells on dealing with dogs from the dog's viewpoint, why they do what they do, and how positive training methods can help them to be fun and well-mannered companions.

Click For Joy! By Melissa Alexander

A helpful step by step resource that deals with how to train a multitude of behaviors.

Articles on the **ClickerSolutions website** (the articles listed are either specific for house training or have information that will be helpful with house training):

ClickerSolutions front page (please peruse the site for other helpful information):

<http://www.clickersolutions.com>

House Training by Wendy Dreyer:

<http://www.clickersolutions.com/articles/2001/houstrain.htm>

Crate Training by Jos Lermyte

<http://www.clickersolutions.com/articles/2001/crate.htm>

Creating a Nighttime Ritual by Melissa Alexander

<http://www.clickersolutions.com/articles/2002/nighttime.htm>

House Training; Ring My Bell by Debbie Schaeffer

<http://www.clickersolutions.com/articles/2001b/bell.htm>

Puppy Training by Dr Ian Dunbar

<http://www.clickersolutions.com/articles/2001/puptrain.htm>