



# The Three Pillars of **Housebreaking**

 By Michael Wombacher  
[www.doggonegood.org](http://www.doggonegood.org)



**“Doo doo occurs,”** or so the sanitized saying goes. The fact is that it occurs so often that failure to housebreak a dog—puppy or adult—is one of the leading causes dogs are given up by frustrated owners. So let’s take a quick look at the basic outlines of a housebreaking program that can be adapted for both young pups and older dogs. Below I have summed up the essence of my program and what I call The Three Pillars of Housebreaking. They are: Confine, Supervise and Regulate. Being pillars, they are foundational to any housebreaking routine, so let’s examine them in turn.

Confinement is key to any housebreaking program because dogs generally don’t like to eliminate in the immediate area where they’re hanging out. You can confine a pup in any number of ways—crates, ex-pens, patches of backyard, or blocking off certain areas of your house, such as a kitchen or hallway with baby gates. These are the most common approaches and they work nicely in tandem with one another, especially when it is not possible for you to supervise your pup.

Which brings up the next topic—supervision. If your pup is not confined in a situation such as the one described above, he or she **MUST** be supervised. Now, supervision does not mean that you know your pup is “back there somewhere.” Supervision is active; it means you know where your pup is because you can see him or her. If you’re too busy for this, confine your pup. You should be aware that the overwhelming majority of all housebreaking problems revolve around failures in supervision. Now, you might ask yourself: “What’s the big deal about supervision? The pup may still go right in front of me?” That’s true, but if you see your pup eliminate you’re in a position to do something about it—that is, reprimand your pup. Yes, that’s right—reprimand. More on that in a minute.

One very clever way in which you can both confine and supervise a dog at the same time without constantly crating or penning is to leash the dog to yourself in the house or tether him or her to nearby objects such as table legs and offer a bone or other chew toy to keep the pup busy. The fact is that your dog will be significantly less likely to pee or poop while on a leash with you. Moreover, you are likely to notice your dog getting antsy in the event that he or she does have to go and can then hold up your end of the deal by taking him or her out, ASAP. An additional bonus of this approach is that your dog will start to understand your leadership role as you lead them around, and you can easily supervise while being engaged in other activities.

Let’s return to the subject of reprimands. Inevitably there are going to be times when your dog does the deed with you nearby. Because you are dutifully supervising your dog you are now in a position to do something about it—that is reprimand him. A couple of cautions with respect to reprimands: **DO NOT**

rub their nose in it, smack them with a rolled up newspaper or use any other well-meant and ill-guided tidbits of advice you’ve heard from your parents, in-laws or old-timers at the dog park. Never reprimand them after the fact, dragging them back to the scene of the crime even 30 seconds later teaches them exactly nothing—other than that you are unpredictable and possibly crazy. So how should you reprimand your pup? By clapping your hands loudly, stamping your foot on the floor, and in a strong tone – not an angry one, but one filled with urgency—commanding “ah, ah, ah—no, no, no.” The idea is to startle and interrupt the pup, then bring him or her outside as quickly as possible, and encourage him or her to finish there, at which point you deliver a treat.

Lastly, with respect to reprimands, please don’t be taken in by training tips that suggest you ignore your dog when he or she is pooping in the house because reprimanding them will make them afraid to go in front of you. Appropriately reprimanding them teaches your dog where they crossed a line and helps them distinguish right from wrong.

The third pillar—regulate—simply refers to establishing a predictable routine, that is, regular meal times and regular elimination times. The more predictable, the more your dog will come to expect it and also become predictable.

So there you have it—the outlines of a solid housebreaking program. If you find yourself having trouble with housebreaking there is a 98 percent chance that your problem can be found in one of these areas, mostly likely in lack of supervision. That being said, there can be many subtle nuances and problems in housebreaking. Therefore, if you’d like more information, please feel free to visit my Web site, [www.doggonegood.org](http://www.doggonegood.org) and click on the housebreaking tab. My entire chapter on the subject from my book *There’s a Puppy in the House* is posted there and includes a ton of helpful tips, such as getting your pup to go potty on command and much more. 🐾

### About the Author:



**Michael Wombacher** has more than 20 years of professional training experience and his training approach focuses on channeling a dog’s natural drives and instincts into behaviors acceptable in the human pack, primarily through the principles of positive reinforcement, as well as through methods that appeal to the dog’s canine sensibilities. Visit [www.doggonegood.org](http://www.doggonegood.org) or email [mike@doggonegood.org](mailto:mike@doggonegood.org) for more information.