

Chronicles of Oliver—Part II Housebreaking

I used to always wonder why they called it *housebreaking*. It sounded to me like the dog was being trained to ruin the house instead of learning not to ruin it. However, Oliver made it perfectly clear that we needed to *break* his habit of relieving himself in the house—hence *housebreaking*. Nothing like firsthand experience to get the light bulb to turn on! Oliver was raised in a household where peeing and pooping wherever you desired was acceptable. His instinct to keep the den clean was erased, much like it is with dogs raised in a puppy mill where they are forced to relieve themselves in their cage. These are the hardest dogs to break old elimination habits. We have to teach lost instincts that come naturally to most dogs.

In the past, I've written about the steps for housebreaking a dog. Putting yourself on a schedule of taking the dog out frequently; keeping an eye on the dog while you are inside the house; or keeping the dog in a crate when you can't watch, usually all work as long as the person stays on top of things. Eventually the dog catches on and learns to go outside instead of inside. (My website has these full instructions.) Unfortunately, Oliver had containment issues and totally freaked when put in a crate. Some dogs quickly get over this, but not Oliver. All my usual tools had been stripped from my tool bag. It was time for some new tactics.

One of Oliver's former families had used a belly band. This is a convenient contraption for male dogs who like to mark around the house. It just wraps around the dogs mid-section covering crucial parts to make it so he cannot successfully pee in the house. When the dog does pee, it gets absorbed into a pad in the belly band. The dog usually realizes he is peeing on himself and that marking is not effective, and the dog eventually stops the behavior. Not so with Oliver. He was like those male dogs who continue to lift their leg on things even though they have run dry, and the fact that he was getting wet, didn't seem to phase him.

So, no crate, no belly band, and Oliver had no problem with hiking his leg right in front of me. Yes, at this point in time, Cheryl felt it was hopeless. What? Say it isn't so? I think the final straw was when Oliver hiked his leg on me at the CFC Dog Walk last October. Not cool. Being peed on was humiliating enough, but in public? Now, my reputation was at stake! How dare he? However, I'm not one to give up easily. I buckled down, washed my pants, invested in buckets of Nature's Miracle and latex gloves, and set to work training Oliver about appropriate elimination.

1. Oliver was taken out every hour. At which time, we walked around on leash until he was hiking his leg and peeing dry. Remember one little squirt, especially with a male dog, does not mean the dog is running on empty. During this time I also figured out his pooping schedule so I knew when to expect the poopy walk (this is when the dog walks and poops leaving his scent scattered along the way).
2. When I did actually leave the house, I enclosed him in an area that was easily cleaned. I couldn't use a small laundry room, bathroom, or anything with gates as he would panic. So a large tiled room was the only solution. Oliver was never left alone for more than two hours which meant hiring a pet sitter occasionally or never going anywhere as a family. Any accidents that happened while we were gone were cleaned without a word to him. Yes, under my breath I was swearing—but not out loud to the dog.
3. When I was home, Oliver was always tethered to me. I watched closely for any sideways movements towards corners of objects in the house, and interrupted leg hiking with an "oops" and an instant move to the backyard. Again he was allowed to pee until he could pee no more. Yelling at him mid-pee would create more anxiety, and the possibility of being peed on myself—good incentive to stay calm.
4. I noticed triggers for his marking (a visiting dog, a new object, and stress) and tried to eliminate the triggers or work closely with him around the triggers to eliminate the reaction. Lots of treats came out whenever his triggers were around. The hardest one to work on was stress which occurred especially when I left. I'll discuss separation anxiety and his confinement issues in other articles.

After a year of working with Oliver, there have been improvements. I'm happy to announce that I have not been peed on in quite some time. However, the CFC Dog Walk is just around the corner in October, so time will tell. For the most part, Oliver is housebroken. Some dogs take a long time to learn what we desire, but it is possible to overcome many problems if you are willing to work at it. *Patience—lots of it*—is the key!