

# **Free Run Of The House**

## **How old should a dog be before he has run of the house?**

Wouldn't it be great if you could just sit a dog down and say, "Welcome to the house. Let's have an arrangement. I will walk you, play with you, feed you good food and give you medical care. The only requirements are that you don't destroy my house or urinate on my rug, ok?"

Well, you can't have that conversation, but you can teach your dog those rules. You do that by managing his behavior in a crate or other dog-proofed area until he is able to be out in your home and not destroy anything or urinate or defecate in the wrong location.

### **How do you know when you can give your dog more freedom and avoid destruction?**

I recommend that you follow general guidelines and customize the timing based on how well your dog is doing. If there are any regressions (meaning destruction or housetraining issues) you should return to full management for at least two weeks. You can then give a bit more freedom for shorter amounts of time at first until you have a history of success.

### **My General Guidelines**

I always recommend increasing the physical exercise, appropriate chew outlets, and training when you are working on giving your dog more freedom. The root of destruction is often boredom. A tired dog is more mellow and often sleeping. It is also important to keep in mind that training provides mental stimulation, which is an important component of preventing boredom. These are guidelines. Each dog has different tendencies and needs. Your dog might need to be managed until he is much older, until you find the correct balance of exercise, training and chewing outlets.

Always puppy-proof the location that you are providing freedom. Puppy proofing consists of removing anything that might be enticing or dangerous to your dog. You can also set up exercise pens or baby gates to remove access to certain locations of your house.

1. At approximately 8 months of age is when you can start leaving the crate door open in your bedroom with your bedroom door closed

2. If you notice destruction or housetraining accidents when you wake up, go back to at least 2 more weeks of full management using the crate

During the period between 8 months and 12 months, you should pay close attention to your dog's daily habits. If there is ANY destruction, I do not recommend moving to the next stage of increased freedom. I also recommend working on Counter Surfing prevention and pay close attention to items in your house that you want your dog to ignore. Work on perimeter training, and provide appropriate chew outlets such as rawhides, ostrich tendons and other approved chew toys. I never recommend leaving chews with a dog when the guardian is not there to prevent choking.

1. Assuming there has been 30 days of destruction-free days and zero housetraining accidents, at approximately 12 months of age you can start leaving your dog for short periods in puppy-proofed area
2. Short periods means running to the mailbox, going into the kitchen to grab a glass of water, taking a short shower, etc.
3. If you ever come back to any destruction, work on Leave It with the off-limits items and watch your dog more closely for a couple of weeks

Eventually you will find the balance of puppy-proofing, proper exercise and time that you can leave your dog alone. Don't rush the process. The main strategy is to prevent your dog from learning bad habits of destruction. It is usually easier to manage for a longer period of time than teach a dog not to destroy something once he finds enjoyment in doing so.

### **Regression Period**

It is important to keep in mind that dogs can have a regression period that starts between 6 and 8 months of age. This is often referred to as the "teenage years" and can show up as obedience lapses or destruction. You need to avoid falling into the trap of thinking your 5.5 month old puppy is perfect and give him the run of the house and then come home to an eaten couch when he is 7 months old.

### **Boredom is a Four Letter Word**

A bored dog is often a destructive dog. Pay special attention to tiring out your dog before giving him any freedom. I run all my dogs in the park when they are puppies before I leave them out at night, for instance. You need to make sure your dog doesn't get in the "habit" of being destructive.

**Note:** The ages mentioned in this article refer to a dog that you have had since a puppy and know his or her energy requirements and tendencies. If you adopt an older dog, I recommend that you use management techniques for a month, minimum. Even an older dog can have regressions or have destructive tendencies after adoption from boredom or the stress of the new situation.

And. . . all of the the above ages are approximate. Every dog is different. I have had clients that leave their dogs out while they are at work at 6 months of age (to my horror) and others that have destruction problems with dogs that are 4 years old.

Good luck and happy training!

Tweet

## **Potty Training**

### Housetraining by Limiting Freedom

**Housetraining is teaching your puppy where is, and where is not, acceptable for him to relieve himself. Housetraining a puppy can be challenging, frustrating and sometimes takes a while to accomplish, but all your efforts pay off when your dog is well housetrained and will not relieve himself in the house.**

**A crate is a great aid in helping a puppy learn housetraining skills. All dogs are born with the instinct to keep their bed clean. As soon as a puppy is strong enough he would toddle away from his mom and littermates to relieve himself. By using a crate as the puppy's bed, the puppy learns to control both bladder and bowels.**

**It's important that you, as the new puppy owner, understand that the crate is not a jail. The crate should be a positive place, a place to sleep, to relax.**

**Choose a crate that will allow your puppy to stand up, turn around and stretch out. If the crate is too big, the puppy can relieve himself in a back corner and still have room to get away from it.**

**Puppies tend to need to go potty on a schedule; after waking up, after playing, after eating or drinking. If you feed your puppy on a schedule, so too will he have to potty on a fairly regular schedule. Picking up his water bowl in the evening, a bit before bedtime, will help him not need to pee in the middle of the night. Take him outside if you suspect he needs to go or it's around time that he normally needs to go.**

**Take your puppy outside where you want him to relieve himself. Stand outside with the puppy but don't interact with him. When the puppy starts to sniff and circle, just watch. After the puppy has started to relieve himself, say softly, "Go potty! Good boy to go potty!" (Using, of course, whatever vocabulary you wish to use.) When the puppy has completed his business, praise even more.**

**You will need to go out with him to this particular spot every time the puppy needs to go for several weeks. Yes, weeks! You cannot simply send the puppy outside. If you do, how do you know the puppy has relieved himself? The puppy may come inside and relieve himself on the carpet. Also, if you don't go out with the puppy, you cannot teach the puppy the command you want him to learn or praise him for going in the proper location.**

**When Accidents Happen**

**When an accident happens, you must handle it very carefully. Don't yell or scream and never rub the puppy's nose in the mess! After all, relieving himself is not wrong – the puppy must relieve himself. If you scold him, the puppy may feel that relieving himself in front of you is wrong. This often leads to finding puddles in strange places behind the furniture.**

If your puppy is having a few accidents in the house, make sure you are going outside with the puppy so that you can praise when he goes outside. Make sure the puppy knows when and where it is right to go. You will also need to pay more attention to the puppy's schedule; are you getting him outside enough and at the right times? If you are going to be busy in the house, paying attention to something other than the puppy, put the puppy in a safe spot, like his crate.

Some puppy owners allow the puppy too much freedom too soon and this can lead to housetraining accidents. It's easy for a puppy to have an accident if they are not monitored or can wander off to another room. However, a baby gate across the door way or hall can keep the puppy close and prevent accidents.

Successful housetraining is based on setting the puppy up for success by monitoring, allowing few accidents to happen, and then praising the puppy when he relieves himself outside.

If your puppy is progressing and not having accidents, keep doing what you're doing!

## Freedom in the house

### When to Give a Dog More Space in the House

Your puppy or rescue dog has learned to feel safe in your care, can rest comfortably in his crate, and realizes the only place to do his business is outside. You're thinking about giving him more space to roam in the house. This is a critical stage in your relationship that will shape his understanding of boundaries and appropriate behavior for the rest of his life. Take it step by step, and be consistent.

#### Baby Steps

Start by allowing your buddy to be with you, supervised and within your sight, whenever you are at home. Take him for breaks outside on a schedule that suits his age and needs. If he starts to take a potty break

in the house, quickly interrupt the act and pick him up or guide him outside to finish. Praise him when he's done. To avoid such house training breaks, pay closer attention to his needs.

### You're in Charge

If you fail to watch your pal while he is free in the house, any mistakes he makes, such as chewing cushions or furniture, are your fault, not his. Timing is everything in these teaching moments. Do not scold him if you discover the damage after the fact. He will not make the connection unless you catch him in the act. A belated correction can confuse him and reduce his confidence in your fair leadership.

### Bonding and Socialization

This is your time to "be in the moment" with your pet and strengthen his bond with you. Take him out and about with you whenever you can, so that he can experience a wide range of environments and socialize with other people and dogs. When you must leave him home alone, leave him secure in his safe, comfortable place, preferably a large crate or kennel.

### Testing ... Testing ...

After teething is well past, the time will arrive when you're ready to test your buddy with more freedom indoors. Relax your eagle eye a little, and allow him to roam the house at will when you're at home. Remain aware of his activities and whereabouts, and keep one ear open. If you suddenly realize he's been awfully quiet for awhile, check on him. Be consistent in your usual correction policy if he transgresses.

### Expert Help

If you find it difficult to properly train your pet, sign up for puppy-training classes offered in your area. There, experienced trainers can show you how to use various positive reinforcement techniques to help your little buddy understand what's right and wrong, and feel secure.

### Finally Free!

When you are confident in your pet's behavior, give him whatever freedom of your home you wish, consistent with safety. Leave his crate door open with safe toys inside, so he has his own comfortable retreat. Maintain his outdoors schedule, and be alert to his needs. The bond of trust you've developed allows your pal to be a great companion who fully enjoys his life at home with you.