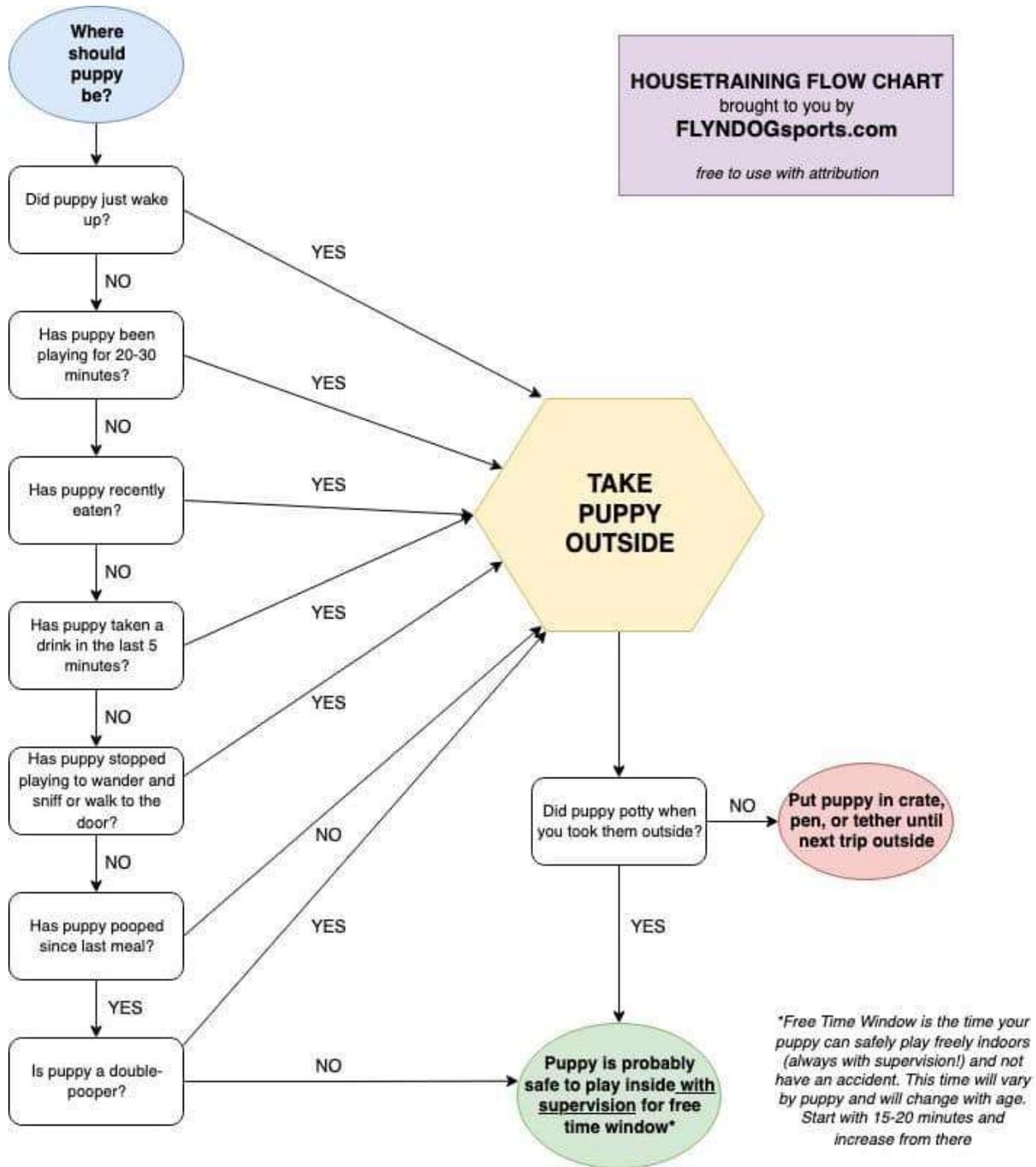


# How to Achieve Bomb-Proof Housebreaking

[VANESSA WILLIAMS · TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2020](#)

**First, a disclaimer or two:** This guide is for normal, healthy puppies and dogs. If your adolescent or adult dog is having frequent accidents, especially if they were previously housebroken, make sure you see a veterinarian FIRST to rule out issues such as UTI, IBD, etc. This guide is intended for dogs to have breaks at AGE APPROPRIATE intervals. Young puppies cannot hold it for a full work day or a full night. Seniors may not be able to hold it for a full work day or night. NO dog should be asked to hold it for more than 8 hours. If you force your puppy/dog to try to hold it longer than their biology allows, this guide will not work to provide bomb-proof housebreaking. I always recommend that people ask, beg, plead, pay, whatever someone to provide a midday break for their dog if they are going to be away from home more than 8 hours. Give a try for yourself holding your potty from the time you leave for work until you get home. Do that every day. See how comfortable you are, see how healthy your bladder/bowels stays.

The below flow chart (not created by me) is the method that I have been using to houstrain new puppies, adult dogs with potty issues, and foster dogs that may not be trained for over a decade. Using this method, it has never taken me more than 2 weeks to get a dog to hold it for an age/biology appropriate amount of time and develop an indicator that they need to go out.



Probably my favorite flow chart ever

Let's break it down:

- First, the green and red ovals are THE MOST IMPORTANT part of this graphic. Read those first!

- Lack of supervision is the most common cause of housetraining failure.
- Supervision means watch that puppy/dog like a HAWK. Like a toddler with a metal fork and outlet access.
- When you can't be supervising, the dog should be placed in a situation that prevents potty accidents. This can be a crate, or tethered to you, or a pen, or whatever works.
- If the dog/puppy can't be crated while you're not home, find someone to watch him if necessary. Every accident that is not prevented or interrupted will make housetraining take longer.
- Follow the puppy/dog's natural cycle. Their biology will create times when they will want to go and should be taken out regardless of an indicator.
  - This is the left hand list on the above graphic.
- I do NOT recommend using potty pads unless that will be your dog's potty method for the rest of its life.
  - Having places where it is OK to potty indoors can confuse puppies and dogs and can make housetraining take a LOT longer.
  - "It's ok to potty indoors here, during this time, but not there, during that time."
- Potty breaks should be SHORT. No more than 2-3 minutes. Less if the dog has a short attention span.
  - If I had a nickel for every time someone told me "we can spend an hour outside and the dog won't go!")
  - Too long and the dog gets bored and distracted. They forget what they're out there to do.

- Too long and the dog learns that if it holds it while outside, it will get a nice long outside time to sniff and explore.
- Potty breaks should be FREQUENT unless placed in an area that prevents accidents for an age-appropriate amount of time (like a crate or pen). At LEAST every half hour. More frequent for puppies (like 10-15 min).
  - I cant tell you how many people think 4 potty breaks a day is frequent. It's not.
  - By frequent I mean you should probably just keep your shoes and coat on.
- Potty breaks should be on-leash and supervised.
  - This prevents the dog from wandering off and getting distracted by smells.
  - This provides you quick access to reward the puppy/dog for going potty.
  - You can gradually wean them to a freer potty break, but make sure the dog doesnt start abusing that to be able to spend more time outside.
- Watch for pre-potty routines.
  - This could be sniffing intently, circling, etc.
  - ALWAYS take the dog/puppy outside if they start doing a pre-potty routine, even if they were just out 30 seconds ago!
  - Each dog/puppy is an individual and may have individualized routines. Get to know your dog's!
- NEVER punish a potty accident, especially after the fact.

- Punishing accidents can teach the dog to just not potty around you. Then they will sneak off to another room or wait until you're in the shower.
- Punishing any poor behavior after the fact does not teach the dog not to do the behavior. They can't make those time delayed associations between the action and the consequence. All it will do is confuse your dog and harm your relationship.
- Leave a leash on the dog while indoors so that you can GENTLY interrupt an accident and take the dog outside.
- If you're supervising properly, and especially if you're not, then any accident is YOUR fault. Dogs aren't born understanding that potty needs to be outside.
- HEAVILY reward any outside potty. Have a party!
  - Like HUGE party. Steak level party. Whatever the dog loves best. A play for 5-10 minutes, get super excited, trigger the zoomies, have a feast type party. Make pottying outside the most rewarding thing EVER!
  - This will create a dog that will rush out to do its business right away so that it can have its party.
  - Continue rewarding and praising for outside potties throughout the dog's life. Housetraining can regress due to stress, accidents from non-housetrained dogs, change in home, illness, etc. You want them to continue thinking that pottying outside is the best so that you avoid any regression.
- Put the act of going potty on a cue!

- Pick whatever feels right for your cue. I use “go potty”, but you can use whatever word works for you. It can be “flamingo” or “Take a piss” or “water the weeds”
- Right before your dog is going to start pottying outside, say the cue. Then they potty, and then party happens
- Eventually, they will start associating the cue with the act and getting rewarded and can start “going” on cue.
- This will allow you to make sure they have fully emptied before you leave for work or enter a new building, etc.
- Notice, shape, and encourage an indicator
  - Usually starts with the dog going to the door as he associates the door with going out to potty.
  - Take dog/puppy out IMMEDIATELY if they go to the door for any reason.
  - As the dog gets better at holding it and knowing that inside isnt for pottying, start “pushing” the indicator. This means waiting until the dog gets just a little frustrated and makes a noise or paws at the door. It’s a balancing act. Dont wait long enough for the puppy to have an accident.
- ALWAYS listen to an indicator!
  - Even if the dog/puppy was just out.
  - They may be feeling sick and urgently need to go again. Is cleaning up diarrhea worth the risk?
  - Ignoring indicators weakens them.
  - Ignoring indicators reduces trust between you and your dog.

- MOST dogs will, at some point or another or many points throughout their lives, abuse the indicator in order to get more outside time. Stick to a short potty break that is boring unless they potty. Make sure you're providing an enriching lifestyle for your dog so that they don't learn to abuse the indicator to get that enrichment.
- Release of supervision should be very gradual and will depend on the advancement of the indicator and the age of the dog.
  - A dog that develops a strong indicator can probably have most of its supervision removed unless it's in a really exciting situation or a place where other dogs have marked (such as pet stores - watch the corners of those aisles!
  - Puppies have short attention spans and can suddenly and urgently remember that they have to go. Make sure you don't set your puppy up for failure by forgetting that biology plays as much of a role in housebreaking as brain power and learning do.
- Attending doggy daycare will make housetraining MUCH harder and take MUCH longer.
  - If your dog/puppy attends daycare, make sure to understand this and not fault the dog.
  - Dogs are allowed to potty indoors at daycare and it happens ALL the time.
- Dogs do not automatically generalize housetraining.
  - This means that they can be perfect in your home, but not realize that being housebroken means not pottying ANYWHERE indoors.
  - You have to practice housebreaking (from square one!) at different indoor locations.

Your puppy's or dog's success at housetraining will depend primarily on how well you supervise them and follow the above protocol. My record for a 10 week old puppy going from peeing on his own bed in a shelter to holding it for an age appropriate amount of time and giving a distinctive groan by the door to go out is 3 days. I have never had it take longer than 2 weeks to functionally houstrain a dog using the above method unless there were medical issues.