**Chapter 22: Recognizing When Your Dog is Relieving**

The goal of this chapter is to learn how to recognize when your dog is relieving itself (referred to as “parking”), as well as how to pick up after your dog and why it is important to do so. We will also cover common issues encountered when your dog is not on a park schedule.

Part of having a guide dog is getting them on a reliable, predictable park schedule as well as picking up after them. In order to do so, you must be able to recognize when your dog is going to the bathroom, or as we refer to it, parking. Getting your dog on a predicable park schedule takes time and patience. Initially, when you are introducing your dog to their new park area, they may not be quick to go. You must be patient and just wait. About 5-10 minutes of being out in the park area is a good amount of time. You may want to bring a watch or your phone to check the time. 30 seconds of standing there often feels like 10 minutes. If your dog lays down, or just stands there you can gently use the leash to get them moving side to side. Next, we will discuss the steps to help you recognize when your dog is going and how to pick up after them.

**Step 1: Feeling movement through the leash**

Most dogs will do a certain movement before they go to the bathroom. We often refer to this as their “dance.” Each dog will have its own unique dance that you will learn to feel through the leash. For some it’s a back and forth movement, for others it might be turning in circles. Some will dance for several seconds, while for others it might be a very quick dance. As you go through your initial park times with your dog, you will want to concentrate on what you are feeling through the leash. Once you recognize your dog’s movements or dance, this will help you be aware that your dog is going.

**Step 2: Touching your dog’s back**

Once you can recognize when your dog is relieving, your next step is to be able to determine if they are urinating or defecating. This will take several park times for your dog to get used to. Once you feel your dog do their dance and then stop, you will slowly begin to approach as they are going, trailing the leash gently to locate the head. We cannot emphasis this enough, **go slowly!** Please take a moment to think of how you would feel if someone just reached out and touched you as you were going to the bathroom! The goal is to get your dog used to someone approaching them as they are going without making them stop, as we do not want to interrupt. Once you get close enough, you’ll want to gently reach out to touch your dog. The goal is to feel your dog’s back as that gives you the information you need.

**Step 3: Determine whether they are urinating or defecating**

For most dogs if they are urinating their backs will have a slant like a ski slope. Their heads will be up high with a slant in their back going down to their tails. If you feel this slant, just calmly back away while praising your dog quietly. Since the slant indicates urinating, there is no picking up to do. For male dogs their backs are sometimes stiff, or they lift one leg. Since they will urinate from a higher standpoint you can often hear they are going. If you can hear them urinating, there is no need to touch them.

If you approach your dog and their back feels rounded, like a hunch back, then that indicates they are defecating. As you touch your dog’s back you want to **very gently** slide your hand over their back to determine where the tail is. Once you can locate approximately where the tail is, you want to point a foot in that direction. Please be careful to not put your foot directly under the tail. By pointing your foot in the direction of the tail you are giving yourself a mark of where the pile of stool will be that you will pick up.

**Step 4: Picking up after your dog**

Once your dog is finished going, you should call them back to your side using the heel command. This helps get them under control as you go to pick up the pile. Remember to keep your feet still while you do this. Your next step is to take your clean pick up bag and put it over your hand like a glove. Now you will have to search for the pile to be picked up. Starting in front of your pointed foot, you want to swipe left to right on the ground. Start by your toe and search away from you. Do not search towards yourself! As you swipe back and forth you should be able to feel the pile when you go over it. Once you feel it, grab it using the bag on your hand. If you search outward for several swipes and do not locate anything, you can take a small step forward and begin to search again. Once the pile is picked up you will then take the very end of the bag by your wrist and you will pull it up and away from yourself, inverting the bag. This will keep the stool in the bag and give you the clean outer side of the bag to work with. Once the bag is reversed you can then tie it. Most people will tie it using the same method you tie a balloon with. Once your bag is tied you can then dispose of it in a garbage can. Congratulations, you are now a pro at picking up after your dog!

Picking up after your dog is important for several reasons. By picking up after your dog you are getting a look into their overall health. A healthy dog will have formed, solid stool. If you pick up after your dog and their stool is soft or so loose you cannot pick it up, that is an indication that they are not feeling well, and you may need to consult your vet. Picking up also aides in keeping a clean park area. No one wants to use a dirty bathroom, your dog included. Picking up not only keeps it clean for your dog, but for you as well. This helps to prevent stepping in anything unwanted. Picking up after your dog, especially in public, shows you are a responsible guide dog owner and is common courtesy. Once you get your guide dog, we suggest never leaving home without several pickup bags. Even if your dog is on a reliable schedule, accidents happen, and you don’t want to be in a situation where you are without one.

Next, we are going to talk about how to prevent relieving issues. Most often relieving issues are not hard to prevent but once they become a pattern, they can be difficult to rectify. It is the handler’s responsibility to make sure that their dog is on a park schedule, meaning their dog is going during designated park times in designated park areas Having a schedule and your dog going during those scheduled times are two very different things.

**Some common reasons for elimination issues are:**

\*not giving the dog enough opportunities to park throughout the day

\*rushing and not giving the dog enough time to go during park time

\*constantly changing the dog’s park area so that there is no consistency

\*not taking the time to establish new park areas or new routines

\*moving or returning home from class and assuming the dog will go because they were on a schedule previously.

If your dog is having significant defecating issues on route, you should evaluate your part and see if you may be contributing to the problem in any way, and then if necessary, call the instructors line for further assistance. If your dog is urinating on route, again evaluate your role in the situation as well as their water schedule, including possibilities for free water in the home or at work. Toilets are always the first question an instructor will ask you about. It is very important to keep your toilet lids down or your bathroom doors shut so your dog does not have access to unlimited water. If this does not solve the problem, then a trip to the vet may be needed. They will want to run a urine sample to rule out any medical issues. This is the next step before contacting an instructor.

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