



Crate Training

If you like nothing better than coming home from a hard day's work and finding your dog decided to misbehave, then crate training isn't for you. But most people like to know they are leaving their dog safely at home when they are not able to monitor them. Using a crate to train your dog will be time well spent.

Crate training takes time and effort, and it is a proven way to help train dogs that act inappropriately without knowing better. If you have a new dog or puppy, you can use the crate to limit his/her access to the house until he/she learns the rules of the home. It is essential in assisting with potty training and a crate is also a safe way to transport your dog in the car or take him/her to places where he/she may not be able to run freely, like a vacation home or hotel.

If you properly train your dog to use the crate, he or she will think of it as a safe place and will be happy to spend time there when needed, sometimes even when you are home.

Crate Selection

Crates may be plastic (often called, "airline crates") or collapsible, metal pens. They come in different sizes and can be purchased at most pet supply stores. Your dog's crate should be just large enough for him/her to stand up and turn around. If your dog is still growing, choose a crate size that will accommodate his/her full adult size and then block off the access crate space, as needed, as your dog grows.

Crate Training Process

Crate training can take days or weeks, depending on your dog's age, temperament, and past experiences. It's important to keep two things in mind when crate training:

1. The crate should always be associated with something pleasant.
2. Training should take place in a series of small steps, don't be tempted to go fast.

Step 1: Introducing your dog to the crate

- Place the crate in an area of your house where the family spends a lot of time, such as the family room.

- Put a soft blanket or towel in the crate.
- Bring your dog over to the crate and talk to him in a pleasant tone of voice. Make sure the crate door is open and secured so it won't hit your dog and frighten him/her.
- Encourage your dog to enter the crate, drop some small food treats nearby, then just inside the door, and finally, all the way inside the crate. If he/she refuses to go in all the way at first, that's okay; don't force him/her to enter. Continue tossing treats into the crate until your dog walks calmly all the way into the crate to get the food. If he/she isn't interested in treats, try tossing his/her favorite toy in the crate.
- This step may take a few minutes or as long as several days.

Step 2: Feeding your dog his/her meals in the crate

- After introducing your dog to the crate, begin feeding regular meals near the crate. This will create a pleasant association with the crate.
 - If your dog is readily entering the crate when you begin step 2, place the food dish all the way to the back of the crate.
 - If your dog remains reluctant to enter the crate, put the dish only as far inside as he/she will readily go without becoming fearful or anxious. Each time you feed, place the dish a little further back in the crate.
- Once your dog is standing comfortably in the crate to eat his/her normal meal, you can close the door while eating. The first time you do this, open the door as soon as the meal is finished. With each successful feeding, leave the door closed a few minutes longer, until your dog stays in the crate for 10 minutes or so after eating.
- If he/she begins to whine to be let out, you may have increased the length of time too quickly. Next time, try leaving him/her in the crate for a shorter period. **If he/she does whine or cry in the crate, it's important you do not let him/her out until he/she stops. Otherwise, he/she will learn to whine to get out.**

Please note if you have more than one dog in the home, separate feeding in the crates is recommended. And, if crate training, crate the original pack member or feed them in separate rooms.

Step 3: Conditioning your dog to stay for longer periods of time

- After your dog has eaten regular meals in the crate with no sign of fear or anxiety, you can confine him/her for short periods of time while you are home.
- Call him/her over to the kennel and give him/her a treat or toy.
- Give him a command such as, "kennel" or "crate" or "bed." Encourage him by pointing to the inside of the crate with a treat and close the door.

- Sit quietly near the crate 5-10 minutes and then go into another room for a few minutes. Return, sit quietly again for a short time, and then let him/her out of the crate.
- Repeat this process several times a day. With each repetition, gradually increase the length of time you leave him/her in the crate and the length of time you're out of his/her sight.
- Once your dog will stay quietly in the crate for about 30 minutes with you out of sight most of the time, you can begin leaving him/her crated while you are gone for short periods of time and/or letting him sleep in there at night (see step 5).
- This step may take several days or weeks.

Step 4: Crating when left alone

After your dog can spend about 30 minutes in the crate without becoming anxious or afraid, you can begin leaving him/her crated for short periods when you leave the house.

- Put him/her in the crate using your regular command and a treat.
- You might also want to leave him/her with a few safe toys.
- Although he/she shouldn't be crated for a long time before you leave, you can crate 5-20 minutes prior to leaving.
- Do not make your departures emotional and prolonged, be matter of fact.
- Praise your dog briefly, give him/her a treat for entering the crate and leave quietly.
- When you return home, don't reward for excited behavior, wait until your dog is calm then release him/her from the crate. Keep arrivals low key to avoid increasing anxiety over when you will return.
- Continue to crate your dog for short periods from time to time when you are home, so he/she doesn't associate the crate with being left alone.

Step 5: Crating your dog at night

Put your dog in the crate using your regular command and a treat. Initially, it may be a good idea to put the crate in the bedroom or in a nearby hallway, especially if you have a puppy. Young puppies often need to go outside to eliminate during the night, and you want to be able to hear your puppy's cues. Older dogs, too, should initially be kept nearby so that they don't associate the crate with social isolation. Once your dog is sleeping comfortable through the night with his crate near you, you can begin to gradually move it to the location you prefer, although time spent with your dog - even sleep time - is a chance to strengthen the bond between you and your pet.

Potential Issues

1. Too much time in the crate

A crate isn't a magical solution. If not used correctly, a dog can feel trapped and frustrated. For example, if you crate your dog all day and at night, he/she is spending too much time confined in a small space. Other arrangements need to be made to meet his/her physical and emotional needs. Also remember that puppies less than 6 months of age shouldn't stay in a crate more than 3-4 hours at a time. They can't control their bladder and bowels for longer periods yet.

2. Whining

If your dog whines or cries while in the crate at night, it may be difficult to decide whether he/she needs to be let out of the crate or for a potty. If you have followed the training procedures outlined, and your dog has not been rewarded for whining, you can ignore the whining. If your dog is testing you, the whining will cease. Yelling at him/her and pounding on the crate will only make things worse. When you remain calm and quiet, your pup will be more likely to settle more quickly.

If the whining continues after you have ignored it for several minutes, use the phrase associated with going outside to eliminate. If he/she responds, take him/her outside. This should be a trip with a purpose, not play time. If you are convinced your dog does not need to eliminate, the best response is to ignore him/her until he/she stops whining. **Don't give in**; if you do, you'll teach your dog to whine loud and long enough to get what he/she wants. If you have progressed gradually through the training steps and haven't gone too fast, you are less likely to encounter this problem. If the problem becomes unmanageable, you may need to start the crate training process over again.