

CRATE TRAINING

When used properly, a crate is an effective tool for managing and training your dog. If you train your dog to be content in a crate, you'll provide a safe and cozy place that she can call her own. When the crate is properly introduced using positive training methods, most dogs love their crates. Canines are den animals and a crate is a modern den – a dog's personal portable bedroom that she can retire to – a safe, quiet place to “turn off” and have a break from light, sound and stimuli.

There are other benefits of crate training. At some point in your dog's life, it may be necessary to use a crate when you are traveling with your pet or when your dog is recuperating from an injury. Such potentially traumatic situations will be much less stressful if your dog is already familiar with and comfortable in a crate.

CRATE SELECTION

Remember that first and foremost the crate is a “den.” Make sure the crate is big enough so that your dog can stand up, turn around and lay flat on her side in comfort, but small enough that there isn't enough room for your dog to sleep and eat at one end and eliminate at the other. If you are training a growing puppy, you can buy a larger crate with a divider for adjusting the crate as she grows.

CRATE LOCATION

Place your dog's crate in a low-traffic but common area. You don't want your dog to associate being crated with isolation and you don't want the crate in such a high activity area that she doesn't feel comfortable retreating there to relax.

CRATE FURNISHINGS

Equip your dog's crate with the following:

- Towel, blanket, dog bed or other soft material
- Toys
- Water bowl attached to the side of the crate (optional)

TRAINING

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 while crate training:

- The crate should always be associated with something pleasant.
- Training should take place in a series of small steps – don't go too fast.



STEP 1 - INTRODUCING THE CRATE

Place the crate in an area of your house where the family spends a lot of time, such as the family room. Take the door off and let your dog explore the crate at her leisure. Some dogs will be naturally curious and start sleeping in the crate right away. If your dog isn't one of them:

- Using a happy tone of voice, call your dog over to the crate.
 - Make sure the crate door is open and secured so that it won't hit your dog and frighten her.
- Encourage your dog to enter the crate by dropping some treats nearby, then just inside the door and finally, all the way inside the crate.
 - If she refuses to go all the way in at first, that's okay; don't force her to enter.
- Continue tossing treats into the crate until your dog will walk calmly all the way into the crate to get the food.
 - If she isn't interested in treats, try tossing a favorite toy in the crate or use a higher value treat such as cheese or chicken.
 - This step may take a few minutes or as long as several days.

STEP 2 - FEEDING IN THE CRATE

After introducing your dog to the crate, begin feeding her regular meals inside or near the crate as 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 at the back of the crate.
- If she remains reluctant to enter the crate, put the dish only as far inside as she will readily go without becoming fearful or anxious.
 - Each time you feed her, place the dish a little further back in the crate.
- Once your dog will eat her entire meal comfortably in the crate, you can close the door while she's eating.
 - The first time you do this, open the door as soon as she finishes her meal.
 - With each successive feeding, leave the door closed a few minutes longer, until she's staying in the crate for ten minutes or so after eating.

STEP 3 - LENGTHEN TIME IN THE CRATE

After your dog is eating her regular meals in the crate with no sign of fear or anxiety, you can confine her there for short time periods while you're home.

- Call her over to the crate.
- Give her a cue such as, "Kennel" and toss a treat inside the kennel near the back.
- After your dog enters the crate, praise her, close the door and give her another treat.
- Go into another room for 3 to 5 minutes.
- Return and then let her out of the crate.
 - If your dog begins to whine, wait until she stops and then return to let her out of the crate.
 - If your dog whines as soon as you leave the room, try sitting quietly in the same room a short distance away from her for brief period before going to another room.
- Repeat this process several times a day, gradually increasing the length of time you leave her in the crate and the length of time you're out of her sight.
- Once your dog will stay quietly in the crate for about 30 minutes with you mostly out of sight, you can begin leaving her crated when you're gone for short time periods and/or letting her sleep there at night.



STEP 4 - CRATING WHEN YOU LEAVE

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

- Put her in the crate using your regular cue and a treat.
 - You might also want to leave her with a few safe toys in the crate.
- Vary at what point in your “getting ready to leave” routine you put your dog in the crate.
 - Although she shouldn’t be crated for a long time before you leave, you can crate her anywhere from five (5) to 20 minutes prior to leaving.
- Don’t make your departures emotional and prolonged – they should be very low-key.
 - Praise your dog briefly, give her a treat for entering the crate and then leave quietly.
- When you return home, don’t reward your dog for excited behavior by responding to her in an excited, enthusiastic way.
 - Keep arrivals low-key to avoid increasing her anxiety over when you will return.
 - Do not immediately let her out of her crate upon your return home – wait a few minutes after arrival and ensure she is calm and quiet when you let her out.
- Continue to crate your dog for short periods from time to time when you’re home so she doesn’t associate crating with being left alone.

WHINING, CRYING AND BARKING

If you’ve followed the steps outlined above, your dog shouldn’t be whining, crying or barking while inside her crate. If she is, go back a step and repeat the process – increasing the length of time at each step if needed.

As difficult as it is to hear our furry friends cry, if you let her out of the crate while she is whining she will learn that to get out of the crate all she needs to do is cry. Resist the urge to talk to her, soothe her or give her attention while she is crying in the crate. Wait for the moment she is silent, praise and then let her out. If you are consistent, she will learn that to get out of the crate she needs to be quiet.

If your dog whines or cries while in the crate during the night, you will have to determine if it is because she has to eliminate or if she just wants to get out of the crate. If your dog starts whine, try ignoring the whining for a minute or two. If she stops, then she is likely just wanting out of the crate. If the whining continues use the phrase she associates with going outside to eliminate. If she responds and becomes excited, take her outside. This should be a trip with a purpose, not play time – take her outside, praise her for eliminating and then immediately put her back in her crate.

PAWSITIVELY HELPFUL HINTS



Never use the crate as a punishment – it should always be associated with something positive.



Puppies under six (6) months of age and adult dogs that are being house trained shouldn’t stay in a crate for more than three (3) or four (4) hours at a time as they can’t control their bladders and bowels for that long.



Sometimes leaving a radio or TV on at a low level or leaving a piece of your unwashed clothing near the crate will help your dog feel more comfortable being alone.





Attempting to use the crate as a remedy for separation anxiety won't solve the problem. A crate may prevent your dog from being destructive, but she may injure herself in an attempt to escape from the crate. Separation anxiety problems can only be resolved with counter-conditioning and desensitization procedures. It is recommended that you consult a professional for help.



While you are acclimating your dog to the crate and especially once you have graduated to the point of your dog being comfortable in the crate for 30 to 40 minutes, consider providing mental enrichment - such as a stuffed frozen KONG toy. You may even consider feeding your dog her meals through a frozen KONG, which can keep her occupied for hours.

