



Crate Training Your Dog

Crate training your dog or puppy sometimes takes time and effort, but is very useful and in many cases, necessary. If you have a young dog, or a dog you have recently adopted, crate training him is very important. You are setting your dog up for success: he won't have as many opportunities to get into trouble because he doesn't yet know the rules of the household. You are protecting him from dangerous situations such as broken glass or chewed electrical cords. And, he is learning the rules of the household concerning appropriate places to sleep, play and eliminate. It's also a safe way of transporting your dog in the car, as well as teaching him to be comfortably confined when at the vets, groomers or in other places where he can't run around freely. If you properly train your dog to use a crate, he'll think of it as his safe place and will be happy to spend time there when needed.

- *Important note: Crate training doesn't necessarily mean that a dog must be in a small, airline approved kennel. Crate training can also mean being confined in a wire kennel, an outdoor run with appropriate shelter, or even your laundry room if that's what works best for you and your dog.*

Crate training is a process that moves at a different pace depending on the dog's personality, age, temperament and previous experience. The most important things to remember when training a dog to accept a crate are 1) always associate the crate with something pleasant (do not use it for punishment) and 2) keep the training moving forward in small, attainable chunks.

Introducing Your Dog to the Crate

- Put the crate in the area where it would be likely to stay for a period of time. Spend some time there with your dog cuddling, playing near it or in it together and just hanging out peacefully. Make sure the door is fastened open so that he won't inadvertently be hit by it or that it won't close on him prematurely.
- Put some blankets or other soft snugglies in there. Toss in some treats or his favorite toys and make a fuss over him as he goes in and out taking the treats or playing with his toys. With some dogs you may need to start with treats outside the kennel and then gradually put them further and further inside until the dog feels safe about going in.
- Put a well-stuffed Kong into the kennel and close the door, preventing your dog from having access to it. Let him slobber and drool over it and want to go in the crate. When he's very anxious to get to it, open the door and let him run in and grab it. He will start to associate the kennel with wonderful things that he wants.

Help Your Dog Really Love the Crate

- After you have spent the time to introduce your dog to his crate, begin to feed him his regular meals in his crate. This will create a very pleasant association in his mind as well as teaching him to think about the crate in a calm, relaxed manner.
- If your dog is going into his crate in a happy manner for treats, toys or a Kong, put his food dish all the way in the back of the crate. If your dog is a little reluctant to go into the kennel, put the bowl in only as far as he is willing to go and then gradually move it further back after a few trials.
- Once he is standing in his crate comfortably while eating, you can close the door. In the beginning, open the door just as soon as he finishes eating. With each feeding, gradually extend the length of time he stands in the kennel with the door closed before opening it and releasing him. If he whines or claws at the door to be let out, you may have rushed the acclimation process a little. Shorten the length of time and gradually re-build to the “sticky” point. Do not let him out when he whines or barks until he is quiet or he’ll learn to bark more as a way of getting out.

Getting Your Dog Accustomed to Spending More Time in the Crate

- After the dog has learned to eat comfortably and calmly in the crate and spend a few minutes there after eating, you can begin to confine him there for short periods of time.
- For the first time confinements, be certain that you are at home. Call him to the kennel and reward him for coming happily. Cue him to enter the kennel by saying “kennel”, “office” or “your bed”. Toss a treat in there. As he goes in, close the door and latch it shut. Sit quietly near the crate or in a nearby room for five to ten minutes. Let him out of the crate after the predetermined period of time only if he is quiet. Repeat this process several times daily and increase the length of time each time.
- Make sure that he doesn’t associate the crate and spending a period of time in there with being “abandoned”. He can be crated while you’re home eating dinner or housework, so he doesn’t think the crate is a signal for you going away from home for long periods of time. He can also be crated at night while you’re sleeping.
- After your dog is comfortable with being crated for 30 minutes you can leave him kenneled while you leave home. Set him up to succeed. Put him in the kennel at least 10 minutes before you leave so he doesn’t go from a period of high activity to low activity. Don’t talk to him for a few minutes before you leave home. Give him a good, interactive puzzle toy to keep him focused and busy and keep his mind off of being alone. When you come back home, don’t let him out right away and don’t apologize to him for having left. Leave him in there for a couple of minutes then quietly let him out. Keep your arrival low key.

A crate is not the magic bullet for behavior concerns. A dog crated for too long can be frustrated and exhibit excessive barking, pacing, circling or destructiveness when out because it hasn’t had sufficient stimulation or exercise. Also, the general rule or thumb for puppies is that they can stay in their crate and hold their bowel or bladder one hour longer than they are months old. So, a three month old puppy can “hold it” about 4 hours before it needs to be let out.