



Crate Training

Owners are often unsure whether they need to crate train their puppies or newly adopted dogs or whether to simply confine them in a dog-proofed area during the early weeks or months following adoption. Here is some information to determine if crate training is for you:

- Housetraining: Prompts the dog to hold his/her bladder and bowels when unsupervised to expedite housetraining.
- Chew-training: Prevents the dog from chewing furniture, walls, and anything else except the chew toys he is crated with so good habits automatically form from the beginning.
- Settling down: Patterns dog to be inactive when alone.
- Owner as a good guy: By decimating house-training and chew-training mistakes, dog partially “self-trains,” reducing amount of reprimanding and bad-guy stuff for owner.
- Preparation for possible confinement: Dogs that are used to close confinement are less likely to be stressed when caged during a hospital stay or travel.

Chewing and activity management could be accomplished with a well dog-proofed room or an exercise pen and these are alternatives if the dog is solid in his elimination habits. If the dog is shaky on housetraining, however, you are better off crate-training as the close confinement will inhibit urination and defecation. To get the crating effect, the crate should be only large enough for the dog to stand up and turn around in. An exercise pen, dog-proofed room or too-large crate allows the dog to use one end as bathroom area and the other end as a bed.

How to get Him Used to His Crate

You can't just throw the dog in the crate and expect him to adjust. That would be traumatic. Early association is important and often indelible. Make the crate comfy with a nice crate pad or blanket, situate it in a high traffic area like the kitchen and, whenever the dog isn't looking, drop a couple of treats in the back. Don't point these out to him; rather let them be discovered on their own. Feed him meals in there, always with the door open. Using heavy string, tie an attractive stuffed chew-toy to the rear inside so that the dog must lie in the crate in order to chew on it.

After a few days of this, start teaching the dog to enter and exit on command. Say “into bed” or “into the crate,” throw in a treat, praise as the dog goes in and eats the treat and then order him out with the command of your choice. Encourage him to come out and, when he does, praise him (no food treat for exiting). Repeat this a few times and then change the order of events slightly: instead of throwing the treat into the crate after you say “into bed,” wait for him to go in on his own before dropping in the treat. If the dog doesn't enter on command, simply wait. Do not command him a second time and do not crack and throw in the treat. You can encourage him in with hand gestures but even this is riskier than simply waiting. If he doesn't go in, end the training session without comment. Try another session in a little while, still holding the reward until the dog goes in on his own. When he does (and they all do eventually so hang in there), give him the treat, do a few more rewarded reps and then end the session. Always leave the dog wanting more.



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When the dog is going in and out on command, you are ready to try the first lock-in. Play the in/out of the crate game, only now close the door after he has gone in and feed him treats through the grate for a minute or two before opening the door. Do this several times. Then practice walking around the crate and around the room while he is locked inside, pitching treats at him occasionally and then, after a couple of minutes, opening the door and letting him out. Make the whole thing a positive experience for him. The next step is to add some real duration.

Give him a couple of stuffed chew toys with something extra special. Set up the crate next to your comfy chair and sit down to watch one of your favorite movies after you have ordered the dog into his crate. When he goes in, give him the chew toy, close the crate door and watch the movie. Leave the room a few times to get him used to being left alone but always come back within a few minutes or so. The first experience being locked in the crate for this length of time must be an overwhelmingly easy and good one. Any noise, agitation or tantrum from the dog should be ignored. At the end of the movie, if the dog is quiet and settled in the crate, simply open the door and order him out. Under no circumstances will you open the door to the crate if the dog is misbehaving; otherwise you are conditioning that behavior. If you do not like it, do not reward it. When you do open the door, don't gush and hug the dog. Behave very neutrally. All the good stuff should happen while he is IN the crate, behaving nicely.

Once he is out, order him right back in for a food treat or two without closing the door before you finish your training session. If he refuses to go in, do whatever it takes to get him in, reward him and get your in/out exercise polished up again.

Now spend a few days locking the dog in the crate when you're at home, going about your usual business. Ignore or reprimand any noise and provide interesting crate puzzles, chew toys each time. When the dog is going in without a fuss and no longer distress focalizing, you may start leaving the house. Leave for one to ten seconds over and over for the first session. Then, over the next few sessions gradually extend the time you are gone, from a minute to five minutes to ten, fifteen, thirty, an hour, two, three, and four hours. Throw in some short ones in between to mix it up. Depart and arrive without any fanfare. Tire the dog out with vigorous exercise and training before the longest absences. It is important to gradually condition the dog and being in the crate this way before using it in your day to day life.



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A dog that is trained to be content in a crate can be kept safe when traveling in a car, visiting someone else's home, or being transported in an airplane. Some dogs really take to the crate, preferring to sleep in it or take refuge there when things get too hectic. Other dogs are never happy in the crate, but will tolerate it when necessary. Still other dogs panic when closed in a crate. While some people view crate training as cruel and unnecessary, it's actually very beneficial and less stressful to your dog. If done correctly your dog will come to appreciate the crate as their own space to relax and feel at home.

- **Choose the proper size crate.** The crate should allow enough room for standing, sitting, and stretching out, but you don't want the crate to be so big that your dog has enough room to make one section of the crate the bathroom and the other the sleeping area. If you only want to buy one crate, get one that will be large enough for your dog as an adult and block off an end of it while your dog is still small.
- **Make the crate comfortable.** Find an old blanket or towel to fold up and place on the floor of the crate. If your dog already has a bed that they're accustomed to, you can use that too. The idea here is not only to create a comfortable place for your dog to lie, but also to remind your dog that the crate is for sleeping and comfort, not for going to the bathroom.
- **Provide water.** This is especially important if you're planning on leaving your dog confined for more than two hours. If you're worried about your dog making a mess, invest in a small hamster-type water bottle and fill it with ice water.
- **Make the crate appealing.** Place your dog's favorite toys inside at the far end of the crate, provided they are sturdy and large enough that your dog will not choke. Later on in the training process, you can also place juicy treats such as marrow bones in the crate when your dog goes in.
- **Keep the crate in a high-traffic area.** By keeping the crate in an area with a lot of people, such as a living room or kitchen, your dog will associate the crate with being surrounded by people rather than completely alone and isolated. Allow the crate to sit there for a little while before you ask your dog to go into it. This way, the crate will become a normal piece of furniture in your house rather than a strange object.
 - NOTE: At night the crate should be kept in your bedroom. Once again, being around humans and human activity will comfort the puppy. In addition to that, your sleeping patterns will influence those of your puppy to ensure a full night of sleep for you and the dog.
- **Use positive reinforcement.** Though it may be tempting, you should never use the crate as a form of punishment. Always talk to your dog in a happy tone of voice when referring to the crate.
 - Begin positive reinforcement by dropping little treats or pieces of dog food in and around the entrance of the crate. While exploring the room and new object, your puppy will begin to associate it with delicious treats.
 - Praise your puppy every time you see him enter the crate. Drop what you're doing when you see him enter and give your dog full-blown praise. Hug him, pet him, say good dog, and maybe even give him a treat out of your hand.
 - Play "games" with your puppy. Drop a treat in the crate without showing your dog. Then, call your puppy by name and say something along the lines of "Where is your treat?! Go get it from your



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crate!" Use an extremely happy, friendly voice and gentle gestures to playfully guide your dog to the crate. As soon as the dog finds the treat, praise him enthusiastically. If your dog is more motivated by toys, you can also do this with his favorite ball or squeaker.

- Never try to push, pull, or force your puppy into the crate. With the exception of nighttime, you should allow the puppy to enter at its own will during this stage.

Tips/Warnings:

- If your dog whines in the crate, ignore it (unless something is physically wrong). Release him only when he is calm. Otherwise, your dog will associate whining with being let out of the crate.
- Be sure to use a crate that is the right size. If the crate is too big, the dog can use a corner to go to the bathroom and will not learn to leave the crate to relieve himself. The crate should be big enough for the dog to stand, lay down, and turn around. If you are starting with a puppy you may need a smaller crate and get a larger one as the puppy grows.
- In case of accidents: Be sure to use an enzyme based stain and odor remover so that your dog does not eliminate waste in the same place. Remember - just because you cannot smell anything it does not mean that your dog can't!
- Never use ammonia-based products. To dogs, ammonia smells like urine, and thus these products can encourage increased use of a specific spot as a bathroom.
- Remember to take your dog out to potty a short time after eating. Most dogs will need to eliminate a short time after meals.
- Leave soothing music or a TV on for your dog while he is in the crate during the day.
- Don't leave your dog in the crate for more than a few hours at a time (unless overnight). You can gradually build the number of hours your dog can stay in the crate to 6 hours maximum (on the rare occasion when absolutely unavoidable), but this process occurs at a rate of one hour per month
 - A 2 month old puppy must have a break after 2 hours.
 - A 6 month old should be able to go 6 hours, but this is not hard and fast. You know your dog - watch for signs of distress and do your best to relieve his problem before he makes a mistake. Remember - sometimes you have those days, too, when you have to go much more often than usual. He's an animal, and things may change for a living thing every day. Be willing to accept some variations.
- Make sure there are no sharp edges or wire ends that can hurt the dog. Some dogs with protuberant eyes, such as Pekingese, have been known to hurt their eyes on sharp crate edges.
- If you must leave your dog in the crate for more than 5 hours, it is highly recommended that you hire somebody to come walk them, and don't do this on a regular basis.

For AAWL adopters who need more information or if you have additional questions, please call our Behavior Helpline at 602-273-6852 ext. 124.