

Crate Training

What is Crate Training?

Crate training is the process of conditioning your dog to accept being in a crate, which will eventually become their own “den.” Crate training is used for a variety of reasons: it is an effective tool for housetraining, and gives your dog a safe, secure place of their own. Having a dog who is comfortable being crated is also useful for confinement for short periods when necessary, for safe transportation via car or plane, and for keeping a dog calm and confined when recovering from surgery.

Why Does it Work?

Dogs have a natural instinct not to soil where they sleep, and this is what makes crate training such an effective housetraining tool.

What Type and Size of Crate will I Need?

While the initial cost of the crate might be a lot, the investment is well worth it in the long run. A damaged carpet alone would cost you more to replace! If you use a wire crate, place a dog bed or other barrier in such a position that your dog cannot stick a paw through the bottom horizontal openings; otherwise your dog's paws may get stuck or be injured. You will find that most crates come with a plastic or metal base anyway.

The crate should be just big enough for your dog to stand up and turn around in. If your dog is a puppy, do not buy a huge crate for them to grow into. Having all that room will defeat the purpose. You may need to buy a puppy-sized crate now and a larger one later. Or, purchase a crate that comes with dividers so you can gradually expand the puppy's space as needed.

Is Crate Training for Adult Dogs, too?

Many people are under the false impression that crate training is just for puppies, and that older dogs will not “take” to a crate. Untrue! Older dogs often learn faster than puppies, and most will appreciate the comfort and security a crate offers.

How do I Introduce my Dog to the Crate?

Put a blanket or old jumper that has your scent on it in the bottom of the crate. This will not only be comfortable for your dog, but helps the bonding process as well. A warm (not HOT) hot water bottle might offer some added comfort too, but ensure the bottle has a cover (Note: There are some dogs who will urinate if soft bedding is present; if this is the

case with your dog, remove the bedding altogether.) Keep the crate where you want your dog to sleep, for example, by the side of your bed. When you first introduce the crate, be sure the door is propped open so as to not swing shut by accident. If your dog doesn't go in to explore on their own, throw some treats inside, or feed a few meals in there. Try not to force your dog into the crate (this could form an unpleasant association and make things more difficult for both of you). Each time your dog goes into the crate, say, "Go to bed" in a high, pleasant voice. Your dog will eventually come to associate the verbal cue with going into the crate.

Once your dog is happy settling inside the crate with the door open, gently close the door but do not lock it. Repeat this for several days, ensuring they remain relaxed throughout. It's worth providing a longer lasting chew or stuffed Kong inside the crate to increase the time it takes to consume their reward. **Please avoid all raw hide chews as these can be very dangerous as they can cause choking!** To increase their sense of security, cover the crate with a thick blanket or towel so that all sides are covered apart from the door.

The first night, say, "Go to bed" as you gently help your dog in, then softly close the door. Keep the process low key and calm. You may want to put a toy in with them and/or an edible chew. It is perfectly normal for a dog to whine or bark the first night in a crate. There are some dogs who will have trouble holding their bladder all night (usually young pups). You will quickly come to know the difference between a normal whine and a need-to-urinate whine. If the whining becomes frantic during the night, open the crate and bring them out to the spot where you want them to eliminate. As they do, praise them, then immediately return them to the crate. Most dogs get used to this routine very quickly and soon sleep through the night without interruption. One thing to remember is to make it boring, they will quickly learn that these nocturnal activities aren't much fun and will stop pestering you.

The Routine

First thing in the morning, open the crate door and take your dog to the preferred elimination spot. As soon as your dog begins to circle and sniff, or otherwise indicates that they are about to go, use a soft verbal coaxing. Over time, by repeating your instruction just before they urinate, your dog will eventually become conditioned to urinate upon hearing your verbal cue. (Use the verbal cue each time you take your dog out to go, just be sure to wait for signs that they are about to go before you say it.) As your dog finishes, offer calm verbal praise. After the morning elimination, either place your dog in a baby-gated area, or keep them with you, tethered to you with a long line or tethered to a nearby piece of furniture where they'll be within your sight, as accidents happen in a split second; you need to be there to interrupt as they happen. Your dog can also be crated for brief periods during the day if you are unable to keep an eye on them, for example, if you need to take a shower.

If you notice your dog starting to circle and sniff or squat, startle them with a sharp verbal, "Hey!" (or if necessary, by clapping your hands), then quickly bring them to the proper elimination spot. If they go, don't forget the praise! If you find an accident that has already

happened, consider it your own mistake and clean it up quietly. A dog will not associate a correction with what they did wrong if it's after the fact. *Take your dog out to eliminate upon waking and after naps, after meals, after playtime, and before bedtime.* That means standing outside with them so you can praise them when they go, as opposed to letting them out and assuming they've done their business. Be sure to keep an eye on them right after they've returned indoors as well, as that is when most of us are less vigilant, and is therefore when accidents are most likely to happen.

If you must leave the house, you can leave your dog crated up to three hours at a time. This will prevent housetraining accidents as well as preventing unwanted chewing or destruction. Take your pup outside to urinate before placing them in the crate, and place a favourite *safe* toy or bone in the crate with them. As a general rule, do not leave your dog crated longer than three to four hours at a time, except overnight when you are there.

What Then?

Once your dog is housetrained, you can still use the crate for confinement periods if necessary. Many people end up taking the door off the crate entirely, and their dogs still sleep, hang out, and take refuge in their "dens." Crate training is well worth the time and investment, and giving this permanent place of safety and comfort to your dog is really a gift to you both.

