

The Importance of *Crate Training*

Many people feel that crating a dog is cruel and unnatural, that dogs need space. In fact, much of the time that dogs are home alone is spent sleeping, so it is simply geography whether they are sleeping in the crate or among the couch pillows that they've just shredded. Many dogs, when properly introduced to the crate *right from the start*, can grow to love their private space. The key, especially with a shelter dog, is to introduce them to the crate on their very first night in their new home. It will be a much less challenging transition for them then, after their time in a shelter kennel, than to adjust to a crate after having a month of freedom in their new home.

Why crate-train your dog?

- 🐾 To help with housetraining, as dogs generally do not like to potty where they sleep
- 🐾 To make a safe place for your dog while you're not actively watching him, a place where he can't destroy things in your home
- 🐾 To give your dog a private space he can call his own when he needs time away from a big family gathering or from the kids and all their friends
- 🐾 To build his comfort with separation
- 🐾 To help gradually introduce a new animal to the household
- 🐾 To keep him safe when traveling



What size crate should I buy?

- 🐾 For housetraining, the crate should only be big enough that the dog can stand up, turn around and lie down comfortably. If it's too big, a dog will be able to pee or poop at one end and sleep at the other.
- 🐾 Once the dog is housetrained, you can use as big a crate as you want. Some dogs who have had a previous bad experience in a crate may do better with an x-pen or a dog-proof room to keep them safe when you're not watching them.

How do I teach my dog to love his crate?

- 🐾 Sit down in front of the crate with your dog and some treats he really likes. Show him a treat and toss it just inside the mouth of the crate. The dog should step toward the crate and get the treat.
- 🐾 Repeat several times, each time tossing the treat a little further inside the crate. Let him run back out... don't shut the door just yet!
- 🐾 Soon your dog should be happily running in and out of the crate, and perhaps not even wanting to leave it. At this point you can introduce a cue to tell the dog to go inside the crate, such as "kennel up". Say this just prior to cuing your dog to go into the crate.
- 🐾 You can add a cue to lie down at this point, if your dog knows this command. Eventually, wait for your dog to offer a "down" rather than cueing it. After all, you want "kennel up!" to mean "go into your crate and lie down".
- 🐾 Once the dog is happily running into the crate and staying there for 10 seconds, start closing the door. Give a treat through the door, then let the dog out immediately.

- 🐾 Next, close the door and give two treats, waiting gradually longer times before giving the second one.
- 🐾 Continue to increase the time the dog is inside the crate, with the door latched shut. If the dog stands up or scratches at the door, say “uh uh” and cue the dog to lie down again.
- 🐾 Once the dog is content running into the crate and lying down, give him something nice to eat or chew while in the crate, such as a stuffed Kong or Goodie Ship, a Dentabone or Greenie, or a chew bone (unless your dog guards these items.)
- 🐾 Make sure that some of your repetitions with the crate door closed involve your leaving the room. You want him to be self-sufficient and content to spend time alone in his crate.
- 🐾 At this point, you should also have your dog sleep in his crate at night. If the crate is beside your bed, your dog may be less inclined to fuss. You can easily put your hand up to the cage for him to sniff to know you’re right there. Besides, he’ll be happiest sleeping in the same room with his human pack.

What if my dog hates his crate or cries to get out?

- 🐾 If your dog has had a previous bad experience with a crate, you may have to take things more slowly. With these dogs, it helps to do many short practice sessions and feed all meals in an open crate.
- 🐾 Any time the dog is whining, barking, or scratching to be released from the crate, *always* cue the dog to sit or lie down before opening the door. The dog will learn that sitting or lying down is the best way to get you to open the door.
- 🐾 Vocal protest may mean that you have increased the duration of his time in the crate by too large a jump. Let him out when he’s quiet, let him take a bit of a break from the crate, and then step back a bit in the amount of time you’re leaving him in there.
- 🐾 Make sure you don’t inadvertently teach the dog to whine, bark, or scratch to be released. You must make sure that most of the time you release the dog from the crate *before* he engages in these behaviors. If you find that he is always demanding to be released, you need to start from square one and build up his comfort level again.

Can a crate be misused?

- 🐾 The crate should *not* be used to contain a dog simply because the dog is a nuisance and requires attention.
- 🐾 A dog should never be left in a crate for extended periods of time. Young puppies should not be crated for more than an hour or two at a time, except at night.
- 🐾 For an adult dog to be crated during an 8-hour workday, he’ll need at least 30-60 minutes of aerobic exercise beforehand, a dog walk part way through the day, and then more exercise upon your return.

Should crating ever be used as a means of punishing the dog?

- 🐾 While it can be acceptable to use the crate *sparingly* as a time-out place, the dog also has to have had many additional experiences with the crate as a pleasant place to be.

Final tips

- 🐾 Make sure that all the best things in life happen in the crate: meals, snacks, the introduction of new toys to play with, chewies, etc.
- 🐾 It’s always best to start exercises with the crate after your dog has had some exercise, so that he’s ready to settle down for a bit of a snack and a rest.
- 🐾 When your dog’s not watching, slip little treats under the bedding that he’ll find on his next visit. Before you know it, he’ll be racing to his crate to see what new surprises await him!