

Crate Training Your Dog

Teaching your dog how to use a crate is of great benefit to both you and your dog. When properly introduced, the crate offers a sanctuary to your dog when it needs a place to escape to or when it needs to be left unsupervised. By using the crate correctly, you can very efficiently house train a new dog and manage it at times that it cannot be under direct supervision. The key to ensuring your success when using a crate for your dog is to establish the crate as a GREAT place, a place where safety and good things are found.

Crate Training – Choosing the Right Crate

There are several different types of crates for you to choose from: Wire crates, plastic “airline” crates, and mesh crates. Mesh crates tend to be the least sturdy and are not recommended for dogs that are just learning how to use the crate.

When thinking about the appropriate crate size, choose a crate that will allow your dog to stand up, turn around and lay down. When house training your dog, you want to avoid a crate that is large enough for your dog to sleep on one side and urinate/defecate on the other end.

Crate Training – Getting Started

1. Set your crate up in an area that your family spends time in, like the living room. You can put a blanket or towel in the crate, but if your dog likes to chew them, do not use them.
2. To begin crate training, toss some high value treats near your dog’s crate. These treats should smell good to your dog to encourage your dog to go near the crate. If treats aren’t interesting to your dog, try his or her favorite toy.
3. Once your dog is comfortable going around the crate, toss some treats into the crate. The goal is for your dog to go freely in and out of the crate without being nervous. Depending on your dog, getting your dog to go calmly in and out of the crate might take a few minutes or a few days. Be patient!
4. After your dog has been introduced to the crate, start to give your dog his or her meals in the crate. If your dog will go all the way in the crate without hesitation, place the food bowl at the end of the crate. If your dog will only go partway into the crate, leave the food bowl partway in the crate and work up to having it all the way in the back of the crate.
5. When starting out, do not shut the door immediately when feeding your dog in the crate. When your dog is comfortably eating the meal in the crate, shut the door while he or she is eating then open the door directly after they finish. Work your way up to keeping the door closed for up to 10 minutes.
6. Once your dog can be crated for 10 minutes after eating, start to crate your dog at times other than meal times. Work your way up to 30 minutes in the crate while you are home then start to crate your dog for short amounts of time while you are gone. For puppies, keep in mind that as a rule, puppies can hold their bladder 1 hour for each month of age. Do not keep your puppy in a crate for longer than they can hold their bladder.

Crate Training – Other Considerations

Though it is very tempting, do not let your dog out of the crate if he or she is whining, barking, or pawing at the crate. If you do this, it will only tell your dog that whining, barking, and pawing get it out of the crate! Wait for your dog to pause in its vocalizations and *then* let him or her out.

Change up your routine! Crate your dog when you are gone and when you are home, when the house is quiet and when the house is full of guests. This will teach your dog that no matter what is happening, being in the crate is not a bad thing.

When you put your dog in the crate, make sure you give your dog an appropriate toy to keep him or her from getting bored. Marrow Bones, Nylabones, Kongs, and interactive toys that dispense food are a few good options. These are all great at keeping your dog entertained while you are gone.

Timeouts vs. Punishments: If your dog is doing something you do not like (jumping on guests, taking food from table), it is okay to use the crate for a timeout. Using a neutral voice, tell your dog to go into the crate. A timeout can last for 20 seconds or 20 minutes. It is not recommended to use the crate as a punishment because the crate should always be a safe place for the dog. What is the difference between a punishment and a timeout? Your tone of voice and your actions. With a timeout, there is no yelling or shoving the dog in the crate and slamming the crate door. You stay calm and neutral while dealing with your dog, regardless of your true feelings.

There is such a thing as too much crate time. If your dog is in the crate all day long, make sure to give your dog adequate exercise when you get home. Not enough exercise can lead to behavior problems.

Crate Training – One Last Note

Crating is a great tool for houstraining your dog but it has many other uses. Company coming over? Put your dog in the crate with a favorite bone or toy to keep them from underfoot. Taking your dog for a drive? Put your dog in a crate in the car. You and your dog can travel safely. You do not need to worry about your dog getting into the front seat or distracting you while you drive. Visiting friends or family for the holidays and want to bring the dog? Bring a crate so that your dog has a safe, familiar space to call its own in an unfamiliar environment.

The scenarios where crates are useful go on and on. Do not give up on the crate after your dog is houstrained. Continue to use it periodically throughout your dog's life so that your dog is comfortable in the crate when you need it.