



Crate Training your Dog

Why Crate Train?

When properly used, a crate is an effective tool for managing and training your new dog. Crates are especially helpful when bringing a dog into a new home environment, and can be vital for helping an anxious dog gain confidence and feel safe. Crate training can also be used to quickly house train your dog, and prevent him from being destructive or getting into bad habits while you're away.

Tricks for Getting Started

Comfy Crate

Make the new crate comfy. Put it in a room where you spend lots of time. Put a blanket and some chew toys inside (if your dog chews fabric, make sure it's a tough blanket, or skip this part entirely...but remember some durable chew toys). If you use a wire crate, you might cover the crate with a blanket to make a "den-like" feel.

Sneak in Treats

Leave the crate door open, and every so often toss in treats for your dog to find on his own as he investigates the crate. If he finds surprise goodies in the crate often, he'll start to like it!

Dinner in Bed

When it's time to feed breakfast or dinner, place his bowl in the crate and leave the door open. Try putting the bowl in the back so he has to step inside to access the food. Eventually, as he gets used to the crate over the next few days, feed him exclusively in his closed crate during this training process.

What NOT To Do

Do not put your dog in a crate to punish him; he will begin to dislike the crate! The crate can be used sparingly as a time-out place, but it should always be a positive or neutral experience, never a punishment.

Troubleshooting

My Dog Barks in the Crate!

Resist the urge to yell or punish your dog if he complains in his crate. Even though it's negative attention, it's still attention—which is what he wants. You also want him to only associate his crate with positive things. If he stops barking for a few seconds, you can treat him to reward him for being quiet, but don't release him until you're ready (and only when he's quiet). Never break down and release him from his crate if he's complaining! This will just increase the likelihood of him barking the next time he's confined. The only exception to this should be young puppies; if they are whining in the middle of the night or after a long confinement, they may need to go outside to eliminate. Take them outside and wait. If they don't go within a few minutes, take them back inside and return them to the crate.

My Dog is Afraid to go into His Crate

Try to go through the plan more slowly. Feed him only in his crate (with the door open, or removed completely if possible), and spend time making the crate seem as appealing as possible before attempting to confine him. Only progress to the next step in the program when your dog seems completely comfortable.

Exceptions to the Rule

Some dogs can never be happy in a crate. This may be due to the dog's anxious personality, a fear of confinement, or perhaps they've had a bad experience with a crate in the past (such as a previous owner using it as a punishment). Some may panic when closed in a crate. You can prevent your dog from becoming unhappy in his crate by making sure he's not over-confined and gets plenty of exercise and socialization.

The Crate-Training Program

This run-down of how to crate-train your dog should be spaced out over multiple short training sessions, preferably spanning a couple of days before you leave him alone for a long period of time. If you keep the sessions short, upbeat and frequent, you can have a happily crate-trained dog in just a weekend with no stress!

Step One: Follow the Treat

- Give a verbal cue to ask your dog to go into the crate, such as "Kennel up" or "Go to bed." Then show your dog a tasty treat and toss it in the crate. When he goes in, praise him enthusiastically and give him another treat while still inside.
- Say "Okay!" to let him know he can come out again. Don't reward the release; all good things should happen while he is inside the crate.
- Repeat this step multiple times, taking breaks every so often. Once your dog seems to know the game, you can move to the next step.

Step Two: Earn the Treat

- Give your verbal cue to go into the crate and point to the crate. When he goes in, praise and immediately give him a couple treats while he is in the crate.
- Say "Okay" so he knows he can come out of the crate.
- If your dog seems confused and isn't going into the crate on the verbal cue alone, back up and go back to Step One.

Step Three: Close the Door

- Give the verbal cue to go into the crate, and reward when he's in the crate. Now try closing the crate door for a moment, and feed him treats through the closed crate door and praise.
- Say "Okay" and let him come out.
- If your dog seems comfortable with the exercise, increase the length of time you keep the door closed, while every so often going back to just a few seconds to mix things up and keep him engaged and responsive. Once he is comfortable with at least 30 seconds of having the door closed, it's time to move on to the next step!

Step Four: Alone Time

- To warm up, do a couple of repetitions of the previous few steps before beginning.
- Once he is happily going in his crate and relaxing with the door closed, latch the door, give him a treat, and stand and walk a few steps away until your dog can no longer see you. After a moment, return, treat him through the closed door, and release him from his crate with an "Okay."
- Build the time your dog stays in the crate without you near him through multiple repetitions, with breaks in between sessions.

Step Five: Long Stays in the Crate

- To begin, give your dog some exercise to wear him out. Take him for a long walk, a trip to the park, or have a good fetch session. A tired dog is a happy dog!
- Now when you ask your dog to go in his crate, give him a special treat (such as a stuffed KONG toy, a rawhide chew, or a delicious meaty chew bone). Leave the room for about ten minutes, then return.
- If your dog is fussing or making noise when you return, don't let him out until he's been quiet for at least ten seconds, then release him from the crate. Take away his chew toy if he hasn't finished it yet; he only gets special goodies while in the crate!
- Once your dog can relax for up to an hour in his crate, you're ready to try leaving the house while he's in the crate (again, with a tasty treat to keep him happy and occupied). When you return, let him out of his crate calmly, like it's no big deal; he shouldn't associate your return with a big celebration.