



Crate Training Your Dog

The Crate Training Process

Crate training can take days or weeks, depending on your dog's age, temperament and past experiences. It is important to keep two things in mind while crate training. The crate should always be associated with something pleasant, and training should take place in a series of small steps – do not go too fast.

Step 1: Introducing Your Dog to the Crate

Put the crate in an area of your house where the family spends a lot of time, such as the family room. Put a soft blanket or towel in the crate. Bring your dog over to the crate and talk to him in a happy tone of voice. Make sure the crate door is securely fastened so it will not hit your dog and frighten him.

To encourage your dog to enter the crate, drop some small food treats near it, then just inside the door, and finally, all the way inside the crate. If he refuses to go all the way in at first, do not force him to enter. Continue tossing treats into the crate until your dog will walk calmly all the way into the crate to get the food. If he is not interested in treats, try tossing a favorite toy in the crate. This step may take just a few minutes or several days. Throughout the day, drop several treats in the crate for your dog to discover as he passes by. Your dog should start to associate the crate with good treats.

Step 2: Feeding Your Dog His Meals in the Crate

After introducing your dog to the crate, begin feeding him his meals near or in the crate. This will create a pleasant association with the crate. If your dog is readily entering the crate when you begin Step 2, put the food dish all the way at the back of the crate. If your dog is still reluctant to enter the crate, put the dish only as far inside as he will readily go without becoming fearful or anxious. Each time you feed him, place the dish a little further back in the crate.

Once your dog is standing comfortably in the crate to eat his meal, you can close the door while he is eating. At first, open the door as soon as he finishes his meal. With each successive feeding, leave the door closed a few minutes longer, until he is staying in the crate for ten minutes or so after eating.

Step 3: Crating for Longer Time Periods

After your dog is eating his regular meals in the crate with no sign of fear or anxiety, you can confine him there for short time periods while you are home. Call him over to the crate and give him a treat. As he enters, give him a verbal cue to enter such as, "kennel up." Encourage him by pointing to the inside of the crate with a treat in your hand. After your dog enters the crate, praise him, give him the treat and close the door. Leave the room for a few minutes, then return and release the dog. If your dog begins to whine, ignore him and only release him once he is silent. Repeat this process several times a day. With each repetition, gradually increase the length of time you leave him in the crate and the length of time you are out of his sight.

Once your dog will stay quietly in the crate for about 30 minutes with you out of sight the majority of the time, you can begin leaving him crated when you are gone for short time periods and/or letting him sleep there at night. This may take several days or several weeks.

We suggest that once you start leaving your dog in the crate for longer periods of time, you leave a treat-filled Kong or Nylabone in the crate with your dog, to keep him occupied.

Step 4: Crating Your Dog When Left Alone

After your dog can comfortably spend 30 minutes in the crate without becoming anxious, you can begin leaving him crated for short periods when you leave the house. Put him in the crate using your regular command and a treat. You might also want to leave him with a few safe toys in the crate. Do not make your departures emotional and prolonged, but matter-of-fact. Praise your dog briefly, give him a treat for entering the crate and then leave quietly. When you return home, do not reward your dog for excited behavior by responding to him in an excited, enthusiastic way. Keep arrivals low key. Continue to crate your dog for short periods from time to time when you are home so he does not associate crating with being left alone.

Crating Concerns

Too Much Time in the Crate

A crate is not a magical solution. If used incorrectly, a dog can feel trapped and frustrated in his crate. For example, if your dog is crated all day while you are at work and then crated again all night, he is spending too much time in a small space. Other arrangements (such as a mid-day break or dog daycare) should be made to accommodate his physical and emotional needs. Also remember that puppies under six months of age should not stay in a crate for more than three or four hours at a time. They cannot control their bladders for longer periods.

Whining

If your dog whines or cries while in the crate at night, it may be difficult to decide whether he is whining to be let out of the crate, or whether he needs to be let outside to eliminate. If you followed the training procedures outlined above, your dog has not been rewarded for whining in the past by being released from his crate. Try to ignore the whining. If your dog is just testing you, he will probably stop whining soon. Yelling at him or pounding on the crate will only make things worse. If the whining continues after you have ignored him for several minutes, he probably needs to go out. This should be a trip with a purpose, not play time.

If you are convinced that your dog does not need to eliminate, the best response is to ignore him until he stops whining. Do not give in, otherwise you will teach your dog to whine until he gets what he wants. If you have progressed gradually through the training steps and have not done too much too fast, you will be less likely to encounter this problem. If the problem becomes unmanageable, you may need to start the crate training process over again.

Mid-day Breaks

Ideally, adult dogs should not be crated for more than four hours without a break. If you are crating your recently adopted adult dog while you are at work for nine to ten hours you must make arrangements for a mid-day break. If you cannot make the trip home, a trusted friend or neighbor may be willing to walk your dog.

Professional dog walkers can also provide mid-day breaks. The profession has become a big business and it is important that you choose someone who is reliable. Moreover, they should be licensed and insured. When considering a dog walker, ask for references and expect that the person come for a preliminary visit to meet your dog before they are hired.