



## Crate Training

### Getting Started

Dogs are commonly expected to naturally be happy and calm in their crate, and that a dog can be left alone in their crate without any prior training. This is the single biggest contributor to anxiety involving the crate. Since crating a dog means separation and isolation, things that are **naturally aversive to a social animal such as dogs**, the dog must be **conditioned** to enjoy their crate from the beginning. Crate training is a system that uses desensitization and counterconditioning to create positive associations between a dog and their crate so that the dog enjoys being in their crate, and it becomes a safe space that belongs entirely to the dog. If a dog's first experience with a crate is isolation, it will be very difficult to repair his relationship with the crate and make it a positive experience in the future!

The location and methods should be designed to keep the experience positive. For example, the dog should be encouraged to sleep, nap, or play with its chew toys in its confinement area. On the other hand, if the dog is confined at a time when he is in need of play, attention, or elimination, then escape attempts and anxiety are sure to be expected. If a dog's attempts at escape are successful just one time (thus the behavior is rewarded), then future, more ambitious attempts to escape are likely, and you will very quickly have a determined escape artist. Therefore, be sure that your crate is secure from the beginning.

Also, the crate must **never be used for punishment or only when the owner is gone**. If the crate is only ever used when the dog is alone, he will never enjoy his crate because his only experience with it is negative. And if the dog ever needs a "time out," a small room or baby gate should be used instead.

### Benefits of Crate Training

- For dogs who enjoy chewing and/or scavenging, crate training is essential. If these dogs are not confined when their owner is gone, they may destroy the home or ingest something toxic.
- Crate training is also essential for proper housetraining in puppies or even adult dogs, since dogs who are not fully housetrained yet should not be left roaming the house unsupervised.
- Crate training provides a dog with a "home base" that will always be their own space to retreat to when they are stressed, which is hugely helpful for dogs who get anxious or overstimulated easily.

### Quick and Dirty Crate Training Suggestions

- Sit by the crate and give your dog a treat anytime he goes near the crate. Soon he will begin going toward the crate on his own, probably displaying more interest over time. Gradually reward him for getting closer and closer to the crate, and any interest he has

in it (even looking at it). Eventually he should begin going into the crate. If he doesn't, lure him into it by tossing treats into the crate until he goes in on his own, and then reward him. You can now begin adding a cue such as "crate" or "place." This helps to form a positive relationship with the crate, due to the association with both treats and training (which should be fun for your dog!).

- Every time you walk past the crate, toss a treat or two into it for your dog to find. Pretty soon, he'll be going to his crate all the time looking for a treat! This will help him form a positive relationship with the crate as well.
- Leave the crate open for your dog all day, and reward him any time he goes into it.
- Always feed your dog his meals in his crate, and give his favorite treats/interactive toys (such as Kongs or bones) in his crate. This may be a good time to begin closing the door for a minute or two.
- The **location** of the crate can play a big role in how they feel about it. Some dogs are more comfortable in their crate when they are in a social area and can see other people or pets in the home, and may cry in the crate if they are in an isolated, quiet area. However, some dogs may need to be in a quiet, isolated area to relax (like a back room with the lights off and door closed). Covering the crate and/or playing (quiet) music or white noise to block out extra stimuli may be helpful for many dogs to help them relax as well, because if they can hear other people or pets in the home—or any outside noise—they may become anxious or reactive. Give different locations a try and see how your dog responds.

#### **Introducing/Desensitizing Dogs to Crates:**

The table below breaks down the progression to practice to desensitize your dog to the crate. Some dogs will pick this up very quickly, while others may need some extra time. Keep training sessions short (5 to 15 minutes, depending on what step you're on and how your dog is responding), and stop at the first signs of any stress. **Don't move on to the next step** until your dog is completely calm and relaxed, not showing any signs of stress or reluctant behavior on the current step.

- "Push" = move on to next step
- Stay on current step if not meeting criteria needed to push
- Drop to previous step if you start seeing signs of stress

Step	Directions	Notes
1	Leave crate door open and throughout the day, randomly drop treats at the back	Push after 3 observations of no waiting for you to toss in treats
2	Lure dog into crate, feed at the back (toss treat), let dog exit at will	Push on 5/5 times of your dog entering crate without hesitation
3	Lure dog into crate and continue flow of treats (about 1 second apart) as long as dog stays in crate (still let dog exit at will)	Push on 1 minute without an exit

4	Hand-signal dog into crate and continue flow of treats (about 1 second apart) as long as dog stays in crate (let dog exit at will)	Push on 1 minute without an exit
5	Hand-signal dog into crate and feed and continue flow of treats (about 2 seconds apart) as long as dog stays in crate (let dog exit at will)	Push on 1 minute without an exit
6	Hand-signal dog into crate, close the door halfway, feed, let dog exit	Push on 5/5 times
7	Hand-signal dog into crate, close the door, feed, open door and let dog exit	Push on 5/5 times
8	Hand-signal dog into crate, close the door for 2 seconds, feed, let dog exit	Push on 5/5 times
9	Hand-signal dog into crate, close the door for 3 seconds, feed, let dog exit	Push on 5/5 times
10	Hand-signal dog into crate, close the door for 5 seconds, feed, let dog exit	Push on 5/5 times
11	Hand-signal dog into crate, close the door for 10 seconds, feed, let dog exit	Push on 5/5 times
12	Hand-signal dog into crate, give stuffed Kong or other special chew object, close door, and hang out next to crate for 10 minutes, dropping treats in every 20–30 seconds	Do 4-5 times over 2 or more days. Push if no delay going in and no signs of distress
13	Start a new session and repeat step 12, but now occasionally get up and leave kennel, returning within a few seconds.	Same as Step 12
14	Start a new session and repeat step 13 but now for 30 minutes and feeding less frequently (every couple of minutes).	Same
15	Start a new session and repeat step 13 but now for an hour feeding less frequently (every few minutes).	Same
16	Start a new session and repeat step 13 but now for two hours and feeding less frequently (every 5-10 minutes).	Same

17	Leave dog in a covered crate with stuffed Kong or other special chew object while you leave the kennel for 30 minutes.	Same
18	Repeat step 17 for one hour.	Same
19	Repeat step 18 for two hours.	Same