

Crate Training

Crate training your dog can be useful in a variety of different situations. It is an effective housetraining tool, can prevent destructive behavior, and keep puppies away from hazardous items. If you have a new dog or puppy, you can use the crate to limit access to the house until he learns the “house rules,” such as where to eliminate and what he can and can’t chew. It can also be a safe way to transport your dog in the car or a plane.

The crate is meant to serve as your dog’s den. Because dogs have a natural reluctance to soil in their sleeping area, the crate is an effective housetraining tool. It can be a safe place to take a nap or have some alone time. It is important to understand that the crate is not a jail. It is never used as a punishment or to keep the dog “out of the way.” With proper training, your dog will think of his crate as a safe place and will be happy to spend time in it when needed.

Selecting a Crate

There are two types of crates available. The first type is a heavy molded plastic crate that usually comes in two pieces. The top and bottom can be easily separated for cleaning or storage. The second type is wire. Wire crates provide good ventilation but do not provide the privacy and seclusion that some dogs need. A cover can be placed over the top of the crate, but care should be taken to ensure the puppy cannot pull the cover inside. The size of the crate should be just large enough for him to comfortably stand up and turn around. Crate size will need to be adjusted as your puppy grows. If the crate is too large, the puppy will be able to relieve himself in the far corner and still have a clean place to sleep. Remember, the purpose behind using the crate to housetrain is to work with his natural instinct to keep his bedding clean.

Crate Placement

The crate should be placed in an area of the home where the family spends a lot of time, such as a family room. At night, place the crate in the bedroom so the puppy is close to you. Although you will be sleeping, he will still be spending time with you, and it will be easier for him to alert you when he needs to go out. As dogs get older and can sleep through the night comfortably in the crate, you can gradually begin moving the crate to a more desirable location.

The Training Process

Step 1 : Introducing your dog to the crate

Encourage your dog to enter the crate a little at a time by placing some treats near it, just inside the door, and finally all the way inside. Don’t force him in if he is reluctant to enter. Continue tossing treats (or toys, if that works better) into the crate until he can walk in calmly. This step can take several minutes or as long as a few days.

Step 2 : Feeding your dog his meals in the crate

After your dog will enter willingly, begin feeding him his regular meals in the crate. Begin feedings with the door open, placing the food dish as far back into the crate as he will go comfortably. Once he is comfortable eating all of his meals in the crate, you can close to door while he is eating. At first, open the door as soon as he finishes his meal.

With each feeding, leave the door closed a few minutes longer each time. Continue this until he can spend 10 minutes in the crate without being stressed or whining. If he does cry, it is very important that you do not open the door until he stops. Otherwise, he will learn that the way to get out of the crate is to whine.

Step 3: Conditioning your dog to spend more time in the crate

After your dog can eat meals in the crate, door closed, with no anxiety or fear, you can leave him in there for short times when you are home. Call him over to the crate and give him a treat. Give a command to enter, like “kennel up,” and encourage him to enter with a treat. Close the door and remain nearby, leaving him in the crate for 5 to 10 minutes. Return to the crate, sit quietly for a few moments, then open the door. Do this several times a day, gradually increasing the amount of time he is left in there. Once he can stay in the crate for 30 minutes with you out of sight, you can begin leaving him crated while you leave the house briefly, or leave him crated to sleep overnight. This step might take several days or several weeks.

Step 4 : Crating your dog when left alone

After your dog is comfortable spending 30 minutes alone in the crate without becoming anxious or afraid, you can leave him in the crate for longer periods while you leave the house. Put him in the crate with your regular command and a treat. You may want to leave him with some toys, as long as they are safe to use without supervision. Don't make a big production about leaving the house, but be matter of fact. Give your dog some praise, and then leave quietly. Remain calm when returning home as well.

Problems/ Things to avoid

If your dog spends too much time in the crate, he may end up feeling frustrated and trapped. If your puppy spends all day in the crate and then sleeps in it all night, he is spending too much time in one space. For extended times alone, he may need to be confined to single room of the house that is safe.

Be sure to offer your puppy plenty of physical and mental stimulation. The crate is not a magic solution, but it can be a great tool if used properly.