

## Crate Training

Crate training uses a dog's natural instincts as a den animal. A dog's den is his home, a place to sleep, and a place to hide from danger. The crate becomes your dog's safe spot, an ideal spot to snooze or take refuge during a thunderstorm.

- The primary use for a crate is housetraining. Most dogs don't like to eliminate where they sleep.
- The crate can limit access to the rest of the house while he learns other rules, like not chewing on furniture.
- Crates are also the safest way to transport your dog in the car.

A crate isn't a magical solution. If not used correctly, a dog can feel trapped and frustrated.

- Never use the crate as a punishment. Your dog will start to fear it and refuse to enter it.
- Don't leave your dog in the crate too long. A dog that's crated day and night doesn't get enough exercise or human interaction and can become depressed or anxious. You may have to change your schedule, hire a pet sitter, or take your dog to a doggie daycare facility to reduce the amount of time he must spend in his crate every day.
- Puppies under six months of age shouldn't stay in a crate for more than three or four hours at a time. They can't control their bladders and bowels for that long. The same goes for adult dogs that are being housetrained. Physically, they can hold it, but they don't know they're supposed to.

### Selecting a Crate

Your dog's crate should be just large enough for him to stand up and turn around in. If your dog is still growing, choose a crate size that will accommodate his adult size. Block off the excess crate space so your dog can't eliminate at one end and sleep on the other. Most wire crates come with a divider to make this easier to achieve.

### The Crate Training Process

Crate training can take days or weeks, depending on your dog's age, temperament, and past experiences. It's important to keep two things in mind while crate training:

- The crate should always be associated with something pleasant.
- Training should take place in a series of small steps. Don't go too fast.

*Step 1: Introduce your dog to the crate*

Place 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. Keep the door open and let the dog explore the crate at his leisure. Some dogs will be naturally curious and start sleeping in the crate right away.

- **Treat Fairy:** once the crate is set up, randomly toss a few treats in the crate when your dog isn't looking. Let him find them on his own. This will peak his curiosity and he will go back to the crate often to check for more!
- Bring him over to the crate, and talk to him in a happy tone of voice.
- Encourage your dog to enter the crate by dropping some small food treats nearby, then just inside the door, and finally, all the way inside the crate. If he refuses to go all the way in at first, that's okay; don't 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. This step may take a few minutes or as long as several days.

### *Step 2: Lengthen the crating periods*

Start by feeding your dog in the crate with the door closed. Once your dog is eating his regular meals in the crate with no sign of fear or anxiety, you can keep him there for short time periods while you're home.

1. Call him over to the crate and give him a cue to enter, such as "kennel." Encourage him by pointing to the inside of the crate with a treat in your hand.
2. After your dog enters the crate, praise him, give him the treat, and close the door.
3. Sit quietly near the crate for a few minutes, and then go into another room for a few minutes. Return, sit quietly again for a short time, and then let him out of the crate.
4. Repeat this process several times a day, gradually increasing the length of time you leave him in the crate and the length of time you're out of his sight. It may also help to use a Kong or other interactive toy when you first start doing this.

### *Step 3: Crate your dog when you leave*

After your dog can spend about 30 minutes in the crate without becoming anxious or afraid, you can begin leaving him crated for short periods when you leave the house. Don't make your departures emotional and prolonged—they should be matter-of-fact. Praise your dog briefly, give him a treat for entering the crate, and then leave quietly. When you return home, don't reward your dog for excited behavior by responding to him in an excited, enthusiastic way. Keep arrivals low key to avoid increasing his anxiety over when you will return. Continue to crate your dog for short periods from time to time when you're home so he doesn't associate crating with being left alone.

You should also ignore your dog when they whine in the crate. If you consistently let them out when they whine, they figure out that it works! If you are potty training your puppy and think they are whining to go out, you can wait for them to settle down some and then take them out.