

# Crate Training Your Dog

Crate training your dog can be useful in a variety of situations. If you have a new dog or puppy, you can use the crate to limit his access to the house until he learns what he can and can't chew and where he can and can't eliminate. If you properly train your dog to use the crate, he will think of it as his safe place and will be happy to spend time there. Always remove his collar and provide water for your dog anytime he is in the crate.

## Selecting a Crate

Crates may be plastic (often called "flight kennels") or collapsible, metal pens. Your dog's crate should be large enough for him to stand up and turn around in.

## The Crate Training Process

Crate training can take days or weeks, depending on your dog's age, temperament and past experiences. Two important things to keep in mind are that the crate should always be associated with something pleasant and training should take place in a series of small steps.

### 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.

To encourage your dog to enter the crate, drop 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, 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. If he isn't interested in treats, try tossing a favorite toy in the crate.

### Step 2: Feeding Your Dog in the Crate

After introducing your dog to the crate, begin feeding him his regular meals near 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's 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's staying in the crate for 10 minutes or so after eating. If he begins to whine to be let out, you may have increased the length of time too quickly. Next time, try leaving him in the crate for a shorter time period. If he does whine or cry in the crate, it's imperative that you not let him out until he stops. Otherwise, he'll learn that the way to get out of the crate is to whine and he'll keep doing it.

### Step 3: Using the Crate 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're home. Call him over to the crate and give him a treat. Give him a command 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. Sit quietly near the crate for five to 10 minutes and then go into another room for a few minutes. Return, sit quietly again for a short time, then let him out of the crate.

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're 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're gone for short time periods and/or

letting him sleep there at night. This may take several days or several weeks.

It's ok to leave a few safe toys (nylabones, kong toys, squirrel dude, buster cube) in the crate with your dog. Some dogs will develop separation anxiety and it is important to make sure your departure and arrival are low key and unemotional. Give him a calm command to kennel up, a small treat and toys and then leave. When arriving back home, you can calmly greet him and take him outside to relieve himself. 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.

### **Potential Problems**

It is important to not leave your pet in the crate for too much time. If you crate him all day while you're at work, you may not be able to crate him all night. It's important to make sure puppies less than 6 months old are let out every 3-4 hours so that they relieve themselves and also have time to play.

It can be difficult to know if your dog is whining or crying because he needs to be let outside to eliminate or if he's just crying to be let out of the crate. Try to ignore the whining and not reward that behavior. If the whining continues after you've ignored him for several minutes, try taking him outside on a leash to eliminate. This should not be play time. Try to use a key phrase when you take him out to eliminate ("potty time"). If you let your dog out every time he whines or cries, he will soon learn to whine long and loud to get out of the crate.