

## Crate Training Your Dog

When you think of puppies, you have to see them in the same way as babies. Just as you would not leave an unsupervised child alone in your house, nor should you leave an unsupervised dog alone in the house until they have been completely trained. A dog left alone will make choices, choices like, “where should I urinate?” or “what can I chew up?” Any dog under 2 years of age, or a dog at any age that has difficulty with housetraining or destructive behavior, is an excellent candidate for crate training. If you have just brought your new dog home, it is critical to introduce the crate the first day. Setting a schedule and sticking to it as well as getting your dog comfortable to being alone are important for his mental adjustment.

The key to keeping your home and your pet protected is prevention. By successfully crate training your dog, he is given the proper tools for the prevention of learning inappropriate behavior in your house. The concept of crate training is simple: dogs possess a denning instinct as if in the wild. Their crate becomes their “den” or place they can go to feel secure. Dogs also don’t like to eliminate where they sleep, which makes the crate an effective house breaking tool. Dogs at any age can learn to enjoy a crate, as long as you make it enjoyable right from the start.

First, be sure your dog’s crate is the right size. The crate should be just large enough for your pet to stand up, turn around and lie down comfortably. If the crate is too big your dog may use one end to eliminate and the other to sleep, making house breaking more difficult. This can be corrected by using a box to take up the extra space or by purchasing a crate that has a divider so your crate can grow with your dog. Next, be sure the crate is in a high-traffic area so the dog is not isolated when put in the crate.

### *Teaching Your Dog to Like the Crate*

Open the door to the crate and drop a small treat in the middle of the crate. Give your dog praise when he retrieves the treat and allow him to leave the crate when he chooses. Keep the door open and continue practicing until the dog is comfortable entering and leaving the crate.

Continue the exercise above but this time drop the treat in the back of the crate. The idea behind doing this is to associate the crate with good things much like you do when he/she goes potty outside.

Next, give your dog his/her favorite chew toy in the crate. If he/she doesn’t have one, try a peanut butter stuffed Kong toy or moist dog food works well. Toss it toward the back of the crate and close the door briefly. Continue this exercise, but increase the amount of time you leave the door closed. Don’t encourage your dog to leave the crate when you open the door; simply open it and walk away.



## *Tips for successful Crate Training*

By following these steps, you should be well on your way to a dog who is comfortable in the crate with the door closed. While you are practicing, keep the following tips in mind:

### *Crates are never used for punishment!*

Used properly, a dog is crated before he is given the opportunity to be destructive or eliminate in the house. Never crate your dog after correcting him for inappropriate behavior. This will only lead to your dog associating the crate with negative things and he/she will learn to dislike being there.

### *Praise your pet!*

Every time your pet goes into the crate, give it lots of praise. You can give treats to instill the idea of a safe place. Good experiences in a crate include circumstances that permit the crate to be viewed as a retreat or place of comfort, freedom to come and go (the door is left open periodically so that the dog is not always confined), company inside or outside of the crate, and regular feeding and bathroom trips.

### *Make the crate a comfortable place!*

Make the crate a comfortable place by putting a blanket and perhaps some toys inside.

### *Crate Training Your Adult Dog*

The following is a program by which older dogs can be introduced or even re-introduced to crates as a place of refuge. The goal is to systematically desensitize the dog by making the crate appear as benign as possible.

Position the crate in a high traffic area of the house and make the interior of the crate comfortable and inviting.

Enrich the space with food, treats, toys and initially, always leave the door open. Feed the dog progressively closer to the entrance of the of the crate, and reward him with praise as he gets closer to the crate.

Eventually, move the food bowl across the threshold of the crate and then just inside the crate so that he has to put his head and shoulders inside in order to eat.

Move the food bowl progressively further towards the back of the crate so that the dog has to go further inside to eat.

Always praise the dog for being in or near the crate.



Do not confine the dog in the crate until he shows that he will enter willingly and of his own accord.

If things go well with the acclimation, the next thing is to try closing and fastening the door for brief periods, while staying in the area.

Gradually, the duration of confinement can be increased. Eventually, you may be able to leave the dog confined for considerable periods of time and tranquility prevail.

Do not leave the dog alone in the crate while you are away until he is perfectly comfortable being in it while you are there.

The program may take time but it will work.

Note: With any behavioral modification scheme, like crate training, the golden rule is that if there is no progress in 3 to 5 days, change the strategy. It is important to emphasize throughout training and beyond that the crate should never be a place in which the dog has any negative experiences.

