

# Crate Training 101

"Private room with a view. Ideal for traveling dogs or for those who just want a secure, quiet place to hang out at home."

That's how your dog might describe his crate. It's his own personal den where he can find comfort and solitude while you know he's safe and secure—and not shredding your house while you're out running errands.

## Crating philosophy

Crate training uses a dog's natural instincts as a den animal. A wild dog's den is his home, a place to sleep, hide from danger, and raise a family. The crate becomes your dog's den, an ideal spot to snooze or take refuge during a thunderstorm. We recommend that you provide a kennel crate throughout your dog's lifetime.

- The primary use for a crate is housetraining. Dogs don't like to soil their dens.
- The crate can limit access to the rest of the house while he learns other rules, like not to chew on furniture.
- Crates are a safe way to transport your dog in the car and provide safety at home when you are away.

## Crating caution!

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 come 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. He 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. If this is not possible – reconsider your timing for a pet.
- 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.
- I suggest an x-pen with the crate inside with the door open for long days (work, etc.) with puppy pads or newspaper for backup during the training period. It may take longer, but the dog will get it in time and be happier for the extra space and comfort.
- Once you are confident you can trust him not to potty in the house - only crate your dog when you are not at home for his safety. Otherwise, it should be a place he goes voluntarily.

## **Selecting a crate**

Several types of crates are available:

- Plastic (often called "flight kennels") (good for car rides, etc.)
- Fabric on a collapsible, rigid frame (not recommended – easily chewed through)
- Collapsible, metal pens (best option for longevity and durability)

Crates come in different sizes and can be purchased at most pet supply stores or pet supply catalogs.

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 retreat to the other, unless for extremely young puppies- you'll need to use this space for puppy pads, newspaper etc. for him to relieve himself.**

I recommend the following even though these are larger than what most pet stores will tell you to buy.

**If you have one dog:**

24-inch: 25-30 lbs

**If you have two dogs, you'll be putting in one cage eventually:**

30-inch: 30-50 lbs

See example below:



### **The crate training process**

Crate training can take days, weeks or months, depending on your dog's age, temperament, work schedules 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 towels in the crate. I suggest for extremely young puppies get a card board box, place it to the back of the crate with their bedding in it

and put puppy pads or newspaper to the front for pottying, they cannot hold it like older puppies can. When they get older and have better control of their bladder, you can replace the box with that nice soft bed you bought for your new puppy! Be sure to take the door off or leave it open and let the dog explore the crate at his leisure upon bringing him home. Some dogs will be naturally curious and start sleeping in the crate right away. If yours isn't one of them or is extremely young (8-10 weeks):

- Bring him over to the crate, and talk to him in a happy tone of voice. Make sure the crate door is open and secured so that it won't hit your dog and frighten him.
- 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. If he isn't interested in treats, try tossing a favorite toy in the crate. This step may take a few minutes or as long as several hours.
- If you have a baby, (8-10 weeks old) place him in the bed inside the crate with the door open and praise him while petting him and giving him a few treats as indicated above. Let him walk in and out on his own praising him for his good behavior - closing and opening the door once in a while to desensitize him.

## **Step 2: Crate your dog at night**

Put your dog in the crate using your new command, softly stroking, praising and adding a treat.

- Once your dog has been introduced to the crate, you can begin prepping him to sleep there at night. At this early stage of introduction be gentle, but firm.
- Praising the puppy for sleeping in his bed is crucial to success. I often give puppies a new toy (Kong with peanut butter inside) or a small treat to gnaw on at bed time to distract them from this being their “alone time”.
- Set up a rigorous play session or a walk before bed as a way to tire the puppy out, allow for elimination and give him a good bonding session before being put to bed for the night. These sessions will help him settle in and sleep well and set a routine.
- Upon retiring for the night, do expect some whining and howling during the adjustment period. This is a tough transition for your puppy, but a necessary one for his well-being. The ability to learn to self-soothe is as important to your puppy as it is to a human baby.

Initially, it may be a good idea to put the crate in your bedroom or nearby in a hallway, especially if you have a young puppy. Puppies often need to go outside to eliminate during the night, and you'll want to be able to hear your puppy when he whines to be let outside. Don't be fooled by your puppy though, they are very smart and learn quickly how to get you out of bed for their own benefit and not to go potty! A whine to go potty is often different from the I want to be cuddled scenario. Knowing the difference will come in time.

Older dogs, too, should initially be kept nearby so they don't associate the crate with social isolation.

Once your dog is sleeping comfortably through the night with his crate near you, you can begin to gradually move it to the location you prefer, although time spent with your dog—even sleep time—is considered by some to be a chance to further strengthen the bond between you and your pet. Whether you decide to keep your pet on a bedtime schedule and kennel them every night or not is a personal choice and one that the pet will find agreeable either way – the kennel is his personal home and he will love it as such and find much comfort in his routine either way.

### **Potential problems**

**Whining.** If your dog whines or cries while in the crate at night, it may be difficult to decide whether he's whining to be let out of the crate, or whether he needs to be let outside to eliminate. First, try to ignore the whining a little bit to see if he settles down. If your dog is just testing you, he'll probably stop whining soon. Calling out to him or acknowledging the behavior will only make things worse. *DO NOT DO IT!*

If the whining continues after you've ignored him for several minutes, go to him once he has quieted a bit (not while he is in full howling mode) and use the phrase he associates with going outside to eliminate. If he responds and becomes excited, take him outside. This should be a trip with extreme purpose, not play time. If he does not go immediately or in short order, bring him back in with no words or praise. If you're convinced that your dog doesn't need to eliminate, the best response is to ignore him until he stops whining. Don't give in; if you do, you'll teach your dog to whine loud and long to get what he wants. As you progress gradually through these steps daily and reinforce for the desired results consistently, you'll see results and be less likely to

encounter a problem. If a problem arises and/or becomes unmanageable, you may need to start the crate training process over again or at least back up a few steps and attempt to assess where the process went wrong.

- It is important to remember that when bringing home an extremely young puppy (8 - 12 weeks old) these procedures will take even longer and you must provide a place in the kennel for the puppy to potty at all times. Puppies this young cannot be expected to hold their bowels longer than 10-15 minutes at a time. This will not ruin the crate training experience; it will just add some time to the timeline as their bowels mature! The steps outlined above can still be used from day 1, it will just take longer to see full results as they are less developed than older puppies.

**TIPS:**

- Always go straight outside anytime you remove a puppy from the crate to reinforce potty time before eating, playing, etc. No exceptions!
- Rule of thumb is after potty breaks, 20 minutes of inside play then back outside again to prevent accidents.
- Take up water after 9:00pm and only give a very small drink before putting him up for the night if he's very thirsty – just like a child.
- Feed at least 4 hours before bedtime to prevent pooping in the crate and give plenty of potty opportunities throughout the evening (including a walk) for success.
- **Collars:** Always remove your puppy or dog's collar before confining in the crate. Even flat buckle collars can occasionally get struck on the bars or wire mesh of a



crate. If you must leave a collar on the pup when you crate him (e.g.: for his identification tag), use a safety "break away" collar.

### **Step 3, Part A: Lengthen the crating periods**

Soon your dog will be entering the crate with no sign of fear or anxiety, you will be able to confine him there for short time periods while you're in the room.

This will take some time to develop and will not happen overnight. Be patient and work at a pace that suits both you and your new puppy/dog.

- Call him over to the crate and give him a treat.
- Give him a command to enter, such as "kennel" or "go home." 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 ten 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.
- Repeat this process several times daily (as much as you can), gradually increasing the length of time you leave him in the crate and the length of time you're out of his sight. This may take a few days or weeks in order to achieve total comfort. (exception: crating at night – we know most of you will have to crate at night – do your best and work with the instructions for crating at night)

### **Step 3, Part B: 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.

*(Practicing crating and not leaving is great. Just randomly crating for varying amounts of time with a Kong or treat of some kind will reinforce this happy place for your dog and build confidence and quiet behavior in the crate.)*

- Put him in the crate using your regular command and a treat. You might also want to leave him with a few safe toys in the crate.
- Vary at what point in your "getting ready to leave" routine you put your dog in the crate. Although he shouldn't be crated for a long time before you leave, you can crate him anywhere from five to 15 minutes prior to leaving.
- 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.

### **Accidents in the Crate**

If your puppy messes in his crate while you are out, do not punish him upon your return. Simply wash out the crate using a pet odor neutralizer (such as Nature's Miracle or a similar natural enzyme based product). **Do not** use ammonia-based products, as

their odor resembles urine and may draw your dog back to urinate in the same spot again.

## **The Cost of Not Buying a Crate**

The possible cost of not using a crate:

- your shoes, clothing, bedding;
- books, CD's, remotes;
- table legs, expensive collectibles;
- chairs and sofas;
- throw rugs and carpet, and
- electronic devices, cords, cables and computer wires

The real cost, however, is **your dog's safety and your peace of mind.**

**Best of luck in your crate training endeavors and remember your best ally is a sense of humor and the love for your new pet!**