

Crate Training Your Dog

Crate training is a very useful tool for 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 on and where he can and can't eliminate. It will also prevent your dog from engaging in unwanted behaviors (like rummaging through the garbage while you're at the store or in the shower). A crate is a safe way of transporting your dog in the car and gives you the ability to take him places where he can't run freely. If you properly train your dog to use a crate, he'll think of it as his safe place and will be happy to spend time there when needed.

Choosing a Crate

Crates may be plastic or metal. They come in different sizes and can be purchased at OHS and most pet supply stores. Your dog's crate should be just large enough for him to stand up and turn around and comfortably lie down in.

Crate Training Process

It's important to keep two things in mind while crate training. The crate should always be associated with something pleasant, and training should take place in a series of small steps - don't go too fast!

Step 1: Happy introductions. Put the crate in an area of your house where the family spends a lot of time, such as the family room but ensure it won't be knocked or accidentally kicked. 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. Make sure the crate door is securely fastened opened so it won't hit your dog and frighten him.

Drop some small food treats near the crate door, 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 days.

Step 2: Meals in the crate. After introducing your dog to the crate, begin feeding him his regular meals near 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 ten 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, so he'll keep doing it. If he is continuing to whine, distract him from whining by showing him a treat, wait for a 3 second silence, give the treat and open the door.

Step 3: Increase crate time. 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. Tell him "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 ten 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, you can begin leaving him crated when you're gone for short time periods and/or letting him sleep there at night.

Step 4: Leave the house. After step three is solid, ask him to “Kennel Up” and give him a long lasting safe food treat to chew on. You might also want to leave him with a few safe toys in the crate. You'll want to 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 20 minutes prior to leaving. Don't make your departures emotional and prolonged, but matter-of-fact. When you return home, don't reward your dog for excited behavior by responding to him in an excited, enthusiastic way. Keep departures and arrivals low key. Continue to crate your dog when you are home (feeding, sleeping, special long lasting treats) so he doesn't only associate crating with being left alone and start to not want to go in.

Trouble Shooting

Too Much Time in the Crate: Your dog should always spend more time **out** of the crate than in it. If you don't trust him out while you're at work all day, make other arrangements such as coming home for lunch and giving him a long walk or a good game of fetch, hiring a dog walker, or consider doggy daycare. Also remember that puppies under six months of age shouldn't stay in a crate for more time than they can control their bladders and bowels (one hour for every month of age up to 6mths)

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. If you followed the training procedures outlined above, your dog hasn't been rewarded for whining in the past by being released from his crate, then try to ignore the whining. If your dog is just testing you, he'll probably stop whining soon. Yelling at him or pounding on the crate will only make things worse. If the whining continues after you've ignored him for several minutes, 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 a purpose, not play time. 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, otherwise you'll teach your dog to whine loud and long to get what he wants. If you've progressed gradually through the training steps and haven't done too much too fast, you'll be less likely to encounter this problem. If the problem becomes unmanageable, you may need to start the crate training process over again.

Separation Anxiety: Attempting to use the crate as a remedy for separation anxiety won't solve the problem. A crate may prevent your dog from being destructive, but he may injure himself in an attempt to escape from the crate. Separation anxiety problems can only be resolved with counter-conditioning and desensitization procedures. You may want to consult a professional animal behaviorist for help.

Need help? Call our free pet behavior help line at (503) 416-2983.