

# Crate Training

Crate training your dog can be invaluable – it can help speed up potty training, prevent your dog from starting destructive habits (chewing the furniture, getting into the garbage, etc.), teach your dog good manners, and provide a safe place for them to stay when they are home alone. When trained correctly, most dogs truly enjoy the safe and comfortable feeling they have when they are relaxing in their own crate.

When purchasing a crate, be sure to get one big enough for your puppy to stand, turn around, and lay down comfortably. If you get a crate that is too large, you run the risk of your puppy designating one corner as his “sleeping corner” and one corner as his “potty corner”. If you are buying a crate for a new puppy, keep in mind that he will grow – many of the metal wire crates are sold with moveable dividers, so you can make the crate the perfect size for your puppy as he gets bigger.

The best way to crate train a dog is very, very slowly. The following is a series of steps, each one to be repeated many times. Individualize the steps for your own dog, because all dogs will learn at a different pace. For some dogs this process could take a few weeks, and others several months; however, investing time in crate training will last his whole life.

1. Start by feeding your dog treats when he is near the crate. Once he’s taking treats happily at that distance, go a little closer.
2. Toss treats just inside the crate, then a little further into the crate. If your puppy is hesitating much, you’re moving too quickly.
3. If your puppy is fully inside the crate, close the door (but don’t latch it) for 2 seconds, then 4 seconds, then 10 seconds, etc.
4. Latch the door with a stuffed Kong for your dog to work on. Walk to the other end of the room.
5. If he’s comfortable, leave the room for a brief moment, then return. Leave a little longer, etc.

When leaving your puppy in their crate while you are away from home, be sure that they are not left for too long. A good rule of thumb – add one to however many months old your puppy is, and that is how long he should be able to stay in the crate during the day. Example: if your puppy is 3 months old, he should not stay in his crate longer than 4 hours at a time. Adult dogs should not be in a crate longer than 8 hours. If you need to be gone longer, you might want to look into having a pet-sitter come and walk your dog once during the day, or bring your dog to doggie daycare!

Even when your dog is crate trained, remember that when you have to put him in his crate before you leave the house, don’t make a big deal out of leaving. Sometimes it’s hard for owners to leave without telling their dogs, “It’s okay! You’re fine in your crate! I’ll miss you!” That kind of “fussing” can make your dog think that something is wrong, and can lead to anxiety. Instead,

crate him as you're leaving without saying anything or making a big deal out of it. Give them a yummy stuffed Kong so that he's focused on that when you leave!

Even after patiently crate-training your dog, some dogs will still bark, whine, or scratch at the crate door when you are gone. Something that you can try is setting up "crate practice" when you are home. Put your dog in his crate (as discussed above), and pretend that you are leaving – have your keys, purse, coat, shoes, etc. Once you are out of sight, just wait until your dog begins to fuss-whine, bark, scratch at the crate, etc. Quickly correct him with a squirt bottle and say, "Enough". The idea behind this is that he'll think, "Hey! Even when my owner is gone, they still know when I am barking!" Practice this a few times, and your dog should improve his crate behavior fairly quickly.

It is a common misconception that a dog's crate should not be used for time-outs, but, when done correctly, a crate time-out can be a wonderful way to correct any problematic behaviors (chewing, playing too roughly, attention barking, etc.) If your dog needs to have a short time-out, calmly lead him over to their crate, give them a toy to play with, and let them relax after 2-3 minutes. If your dog was quietly waiting during that time, let them out; however, if your dog barks or whines during their time-out, simply ignore them until they are quiet. As long as you are not yelling at your dog or roughly placing them in their crate, you don't have to worry about them associating their crate with "punishment".