

CRATE TRAINING

Crate training may take a lot of effort, but it can be very useful. A crate is a great way to limit your new dog's access to the house until they learn all the rules. It is also a great way to transport your dog in a car. If you properly train your dog to use a crate, they will think of it as a safe space and won't mind going inside if needed. Always provide water while your dog is in the crate. Spill proof bowls or bowls that attach to the kennel gate are the best. Training can take days or weeks depending on your dog's age, temperament, and past experiences. This process should be positive and take place in a series of small steps.

Selecting a Crate

There are many crates to choose from. There are plastic (often called "flight kennels") or collapsible, metal pens in varying sizes that can be bought at most pet supply stores. Your dog's crate should be large enough for them to stand up and turn around in. Collapsible fabric kennels are designed for when the owner is present and won't house the dog for long periods of time unsupervised.



Step 1: Introducing Your Dog to the Crate

Keep the crate in a place where you spend a lot of time, like the living room. Put a soft blanket/towel inside. Bring your dog over and talk in a happy tone of voice. Make sure the crate door is securely opened so it won't hit and scare your dog as they investigate. Use treats to have them slowly go farther into the crate. If they won't do it right away, don't force them. Continue tossing treats in until your dog will calmly walk all the way inside. If treats don't work, use a toy.

Step 2: Feeding Your Dog Meals in the Crate

After the introduction to the crate, start feeding your dog their meals by the crate. This will create a positive association with the crate. If your dog will go inside the crate from step 1, try putting the bowl inside the crate, but don't force your dog if they aren't ready yet. Once your dog will stand inside and comfortably eat, you can try closing the door while they eat. At first, open the door as soon as they are done eating. After each meal, leave the door closed for a few minutes longer, until they are staying in the crate for about 10 minutes after eating. If your dog begins to whine to get out, you've increased the amount of time in the crate too quickly. After the next meal, leave them inside for a shorter period of time. If your dog does whine to get out, wait until they stop to let them out or else they will learn they can get out of the crate that way.

Step 3: Conditioning Your Dog to the Crate for Longer Periods of Time

Once your dog is eating their regular meals in the crate with no signs of fear or anxiety, you can confine them there for short periods of time while you're home. Call them over with a treat in your hand and give a command, such as "kennel up". After your dog enters, give them the treat and close the door. Sit quietly by the crate for 5-10 minutes and then go to another room for a few minutes. Return, sit quietly for a few more minutes, and then let them out. Repeat this process several times a day. With each repetition, gradually increase the length of time. Once your dog can stay quality in the crate for about 30 minutes with you not there, you can begin leaving them crated for short periods of time and/or let them sleep there at night. This process may take several days or weeks.

Step 4: Crating Your Dog When Left Alone

When you think your dog will be comfortable to stay alone in the crate for a while, you can use your normal crate command and give them a treat to get them inside. You'll want to vary at what point in your "getting ready to leave" routine you put your dog in their crate. You can crate your dog anywhere from 5 - 20 minutes before leaving. Don't make your departures prolonged. Praise your dog, give them a treat, and leave quietly. You can also leave a few safe toys with your pet. When you return home, don't reward your dog for being excited by responding in an enthusiastic way. Keep arrivals low key so your dog doesn't associate the crate with being left alone.

Crating Your Dog at Night

Put your dog in the crate using your regular command and a treat. It may be a good idea to have the crate in your bedroom or a nearby hallway, especially if you have a puppy. Puppies often have to go outside during the night and you'll want to be able to hear them. Older dogs should initially be kept nearby so crating doesn't become associated with social isolation. Once your dog is sleeping comfortably through the night in the crate nearby, you can gradually move the crate to a location you prefer. Healthy puppies can have their water taken from them a few hours before bed to help decrease the frequency of potty trips during the night.

Too Much Time in the Crate

A crate is not a magical solution to your problems. If not used correctly, your dog can get frustrated. For example, if your dog is in the crate while you're at work and then goes back into the crate for bed, they are spending too much time in the small space. Other arrangements should be made to avoid having your dog in their crate this much. Also, puppies under 6 months shouldn't stay in a crate from more than 3 - 4 hours at a time. They can't control their bowels or bladders for longer periods of time.



Whining

If your dog whines in the crate, it can be difficult to tell if they want to go outside or if they just want to be let out of the crate. Try ignoring the whining. If your dog is testing you, they will stop. If the whining continues after several minutes, use the phrase your dog associates with going outside. If your dog becomes excited, take them outside. Make sure the trip has a purpose and isn't play time. Do not give in to your dog if you believe they don't need to go outside or they will only whine louder to get what they want. Do not yell at your dog or pound on the crate. If the whining becomes unmanageable, you will have to start the crate process all over again.