

Crate Training Your Dog

There is quite a bit of controversy regarding crate training dogs. Roughly half the population of the dog world thinks it is cruel and akin to solitary confinement, and the other half thinks it's the greatest way to train a puppy or any dog no matter what their age.

What It Is

Crate and Den training is a very basic principle based on centuries-old instincts in dogs. Dogs are den animals, they like to have a secure, clean, semi-darkened nesting space, away from all other distractions and elimination areas.



A dog crate is a cage made of wire or moulded plastic. Collapsible fabric kennels are also available which may suit smaller to medium sized dogs. Its purpose is to provide confinement for reasons of security, safety, housebreaking, protection of household goods, travel or illness. You may think that putting your pet in a crate is mean or inhumane and might cause your pet to resent you or to be psychologically damaged. However, dogs view the world differently than people.



As your dog sees it, the crate is a room of his very own - a "security blanket". The crate helps to satisfy the "den instinct" inherited from his centuries-old den-dwelling ancestors and relatives. Your pet will feel secure, not frustrated once accustomed to his crate. Your pet wants to please you and you want to enjoy him. Crate training utilizes this instinct to aid house training, provide security when you can not be around, and to give your dog a safe haven when he is stressed out. Crate training is **not** punishment, and should **never** be used as such.

The crate can help you achieve a better relationship with your pet by preventing unwanted behaviour such as lunging at other dogs or people passing by when you aren't available to supervise him.

The benefits of crate training done properly are numerous. Dogs have a very strong "den" instinct. Most will not eliminate in their den, and being in there gives them a more secure feeling. Your dog will grow up a little more confident if she knows that she has that safe place to go to when the world becomes too much for her to handle.

Like all things though, crates have the potential to be abused. The crate is **not** a substitute for social interaction, and leaving a dog of any age in a crate for hours on end is abuse. A good crate should be just big enough for the dog to lie down, stand up, and turn around comfortably. Too big of a crate will ruin the 'den' feeling and you may find that your puppy or older dog has established a bathroom in a corner.

Crate training your dog may take some time and effort, but can be useful in a variety of situations. A crate is also a safe way of transporting your dog in the car, as well as a way of taking him places where he may not be welcome to run freely. If you properly train your dog to use the crate, he will think of it as his safe place and will be happy to spend time there when needed. This is especially useful when competing at competitions or attending workshops where the dog can be left safely inside the crate. They are safe from dogs walking past that may lunge at them, and they themselves cannot cause any injury to other dogs or people if they should walk within range.

The Crate Training Process

Crate training can take hours, days or weeks, depending on your dog's age, temperament and past experiences. It's important to keep two things in mind while crate training; one, the crate should always be associated with something pleasant; and two, training should take place in a series of small steps – don't go too fast.

Step 1: Introducing Your Dog To The Crate

- Put the crate in an area of your house where the family spends a lot of time, such as the family room or out on a patio. Put a padded mat, soft blanket and/or towel in the crate, preferably with the dog's scent on it so that he identifies it as his own bedding. 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 open so it won't hit your dog and frighten him.
- To encourage your dog to enter the crate, drop small food treats near it, 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 favourite toy in the crate. This step may take a few minutes or as long as several days.
- Close the door of the crate gently, leave closed for a few seconds, then open.
- When releasing the dog from the crate don't let him rush out. Ask him to sit at the back of the crate by luring them there with a treat through the top of the crate's bars, and reward. Slowly open the gate, telling him to wait. Once the gate is open, tell him "Ok" so he knows he can now exit, and reward again for exiting calmly.

Step 2: Feeding Your Dog His Meals In The Crate

- After introducing your dog to the crate, begin feeding him his regular meals near the crate. This will create a pleasant association with 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 10 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 and he'll keep doing it.

Step 3: Conditioning Your Dog To The Crate For Longer Time Periods

- 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. Give him a command to enter, such as, "In you get." 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 10 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 the majority of the time, you can begin leaving him crated when you're gone for short time periods and/or letting him sleep there at night. This may take several days or several weeks.
- With the crate door left open all the time the dog can access it at any time and will be quite happy to call it home. Covering the top of the crate with a sheet or light blanket will enhance the den feeling.