

Doggie Den: A guide to crate training.

Crate training is useful for many reasons, not just for toilet training. Your dog is safe while in his crate and what's more so are your shoes, furniture and anything else your dog likes to chew or destroy. His crate is his safe den where he can escape during hectic and scary situations.

Your dog can spend short periods of time in his crate and can spend longer periods in his long term confinement area which includes his crate.

Most healthy dogs and puppies prefer not to toilet in their bedding. When choosing a crate for your dog make sure that it fits him snugly – just enough room to stand up, lie down and turn around. If you have a large breed puppy include a crate divider so the space for your dog can grow with him.

The type of crate you choose is up to you. Metal crates can be draughty and noisy as the dog moves around. Travel crates such as Vari-Kennels, are ideal as they are secure and easy to clean. Canvas crates are not the best idea for puppies or chewers as they will make short work of the soft panels.

When you go to pick up your puppy bring his crate and allow him to travel in it. Take the crate inside and set it up in its permanent position with suitable bedding inside – the crate should have a number of positions while you are training your dog, once your dog is housetrained and more reliable you can leave the crate in a more permanent position.

Introducing Dog to Crate:

- Hide a couple of treats in the bedding in your dog's crate.
- When he goes into the crate toss another couple of treats to the dog while he is in there. Hold the door closed over while he is eating his treats.
- Continue to feed him treats in the crate for a few minutes.
- When finished, give him a release cue such as "OK" and open the door. Don't give the dog any treat once outside the crate – the idea is for him to think treats come when he is in his crate!

- Stuff a Kong toy with something your dog really likes and show him this tasty treat.
- Put the Kong into the crate and close the door. More than likely your dog will try to get to the Kong.
- After a few seconds of tantalizing your dog, say "Crate-Time" and open the door allowing the dog to start working on the Kong.
- While he is busy, close the door and move away, but keep an eye on the dog.
- At this stage try not to allow the dog to become too upset at being left in his crate. When he finishes the Kong, if he is still awake, toss him a couple of treats to reward calm crate behaviour.
- If he fusses, wait from him to settle. Then count to three, toss a couple of treats into him to reward calmness and use your release cue ("OK") and let him out.

Always make sure your dog has something to do while in his crate. As he gets better in there, move gradually further away, for gradually longer periods. If your dog gets upset, go back to the last position and timing that he was comfortable with.

Any time your dog whines or howls in his crate ignore him and wait for him to settle (Make sure he is not taking longer than two minutes to settle, if so we will have to go back a few steps). When he goes quiet, count to three and reward him with few treats or the release cue and allow him out.

Before putting your dog in his crate make sure he has had some exercise and gone to the toilet. Build crate times into your dog's daily routine and always give the dog something to work on while in there.

The crate should not be used as a punishment device. If you want to 'time-out' your dog, take a deep breath and lead your dog to his crate for no more than two minutes to calm down. Before getting him in there, have a couple of treats hidden in his bedding. DO NOT GIVE OUT TO HIM – if your dog got into mischief you were not supervising closely enough!

Crates and Night-time:

We are all familiar with the whining that a new dog does, particularly at night. Get started with a night time routine from the first night – otherwise you may be in for weeks of sleepless nights!

Get your dog used to the crate during his first day home as described on the last page. Before bed time make sure your dog has had a toilet break and some gentle game or exercise before putting him in his crate with a stuffed Kong or equally satisfying chew. More than likely your dog will chew himself to sleep, before he has even finished.

Understand that your dog is likely to be very distressed at spending his first night alone in a strange place and you should expect him to be upset. Be sympathetic but do not fuss him too much before he goes to bed.

- Despite traditional ideas, one of the best places for your dog's crate on his first couple of nights is right next to your bed.
- Keep a little stock of tasty treats beside your bed. Some peanut butter on a spoon or small edible chews are a great idea.
- When he wakes you with whining do not say anything to him. Wait for him to stop, count to three and treat him.
- Speak to him softly while he is quiet.
- Most puppies will soon be off to sleep again comforted to know that you are nearby.

- Be aware that while toilet training you may need to get up a couple of times over night/in early morning to allow the dog outside to toilet. Do not take the dog out of the crate if he is crying or fussing – wait for him to settle, count to three and give the release cue ("OK").

- After a couple of nights most dogs will be sleeping soundly between toilet breaks. You can now move the crate to the end of your bed. If the dog becomes distressed move him back to your side and repeat.
- Once settling at the end of the bed, move the crate to the bedroom door, then to just outside the open door, then to outside the door until you have gradually moved the crate to the position of your choice.
- If you would prefer your dog to sleep in your room for the rest of his life – that is fine. However, in order to train the dog to cope alone carry out this procedure; once trained you can bring your dog back in to the room.

Crates and Houstraining:

By far the most effective way to houstraining your dog is to crate train.

When you take your dog out of his crate bring him to an appropriate toileting area. Once the dog has toileted, then play with him, feed him, walk him etc. **FREE TIME IS FOR EMPTY PUPPIES.** If you take your dog inside or end play time immediately after he has toileted he will quickly learn to hold it for as long as possible – you are effectively punishing him for toileting appropriately.

While following the above programs you can be houstraining your dog at the same time too. Work toilet breaks into your dog's daily routine.

- When it is time to take your dog outside for a toilet break, make sure he is calm before opening the crate door.
- Use your release cue ("OK") and fasten a leash or house-line to your dog's collar or harness.
- Lead your dog outside to an appropriate, regularly used toileting area.
- Wait there with your dog and be really boring - this is not a play area but a 'business' area! Use the same area all the time – the smell of past eliminations will encourage your dog to 'perform'.
- If your dog does not toilet within a five minutes, take him back inside and put him back in his crate for 5-10 minutes.
- Repeat this procedure until your dog toilets.
- Verbally praise your dog calmly while he is going to the toilet. As soon as he finishes (and not before) offer him some treats.
- Once he has toileted play with him, feed him, walk him etc.

- For the first couple of weeks you may need to go to bed late and get up earlier and sometimes in the middle of the night for toilet breaks – always following the same routine.
- The time between breaks can be gradually extended so as to last all night. This is particularly important for young dogs whose bladder and pelvic muscles have to mature so that they can 'hold it in'. A dog cannot be considered completely housebroken until at least six months of age, although he may be reliably performing within a couple of weeks of training they still require regular toilet breaks and close supervision.

- There is no reason for you to get rid of the crate once the dog is toilet trained, in fact to do so could cause the dog to revert to peeing in the house.

Crates and Training for Calmness:

- Catch your dog doing the RIGHT thing: when your dog is settled lying in his crate or calmly staring into space – toss him a treat. Do this regularly and very quickly your dog will realise that being calm is much more fun than jumping up or chewing the furniture or chasing the cat or digging the roses or barking at nothing etc. etc.
- From the time you get your dog routinely confine him to his crate with a tasty chew or stuffed Kong toy. Do not leave the dog there with nothing to do and remember to supervise the dog when not confined. The idea is to informally teach the dog that being alone is ok; chewing and working on an enrichment toy help to relieve dogs of anxiety and frustration too.
- Teaching your dog to go to his crate on cue should never be used as a punisher but a positive experience for your pet and a valuable exercise for you. Play 'hide n' seek' with your dog and his favourite treats by hiding a couple in or under his bedding. Guide your dog to 'go to bed' or 'crate time' and once he is there and eating the treats, toss him another couple while he is there to keep him on the bed.
Any time your dog goes to his bed himself toss a couple of treats. Very soon your dog will realise that being on the bed is a good place to be. Regularly hide treats or chews there and ask your dog to 'go to bed'.

Crates and Alone Training:

Get your dog accustomed to spending time in his crate while working on a chew or stuffed Kong. It is a fact of modern living that dogs must spend lengthy periods of time on their own so begin getting your dog accustomed to this from day one.

- Put your dog into his crate with a stuffed Kong.
- Gradually increase the time he spends in his crate and vary the distance you move from the crate over several repetitions.

- Once your dog is settling in his crate after a couple of sessions, put him in there with something really yummy.
- Start preparing to leave home: get your keys, put on your coat, pack a bag etc.
- Once you have got yourself 'ready', sit back down and read a book.
- Repeat the exercise but this time go out of the room towards the front door. The next stage is to open the front door but remain inside, then step outside with the door open, then step outside for a two count etc. etc.
- Each time you raise the criteria look out for any distress signs from your dog. If he fusses, step back inside or to the last step where he was still calm. Wait for your dog to get back to work on his chew.
- The idea is to desensitise your dog to all the signs that mean that you will be leaving him while teaching him to cope with being alone for gradually increasing times.
- This routine should become part of your dog's daily training routine.

- When you are leaving for real, supply your dog with plenty of stuffed toys and make sure he has been exercised prior to your departure.
- Before leaving, practice several false departures as per the above training routine before actually leaving.
- Try to work in several departures, for varying times, into your dog's training sessions once he can cope with the above training routine.

- When you return to your dog, do not fuss him or talk to him if he is too excited.
- Wait for him to calm down, give him a release cue ('OK') and bring him straight outside to toilet before playing with him.

- If you must leave your dog for a longer period of time consider adding a long term confinement area that is dog-proofed.
- Dr Ian Dunbar, in his dog books, describes how to construct an excellent long term confinement area for your dog. Using an exercise dog pen place your dog's crate, toys, water bowl inside. You can even construct a turf and grass toileting area in a litter tray within the area so that your dog can relieve himself.