



CRATE TRAINING YOUR DOG

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Crate training can be accomplished in several days, or may take several weeks, depending on the age, temperament, and previous experiences your dog has had. You should keep two things in mind while training your dog to a crate. First, the crate should always be associated with something pleasant for the dog, and second, training should take place in a series of small steps- don't try to do too much too fast.

STEP 1: INTRODUCING YOUR DOG TO THE CRATE

Put the crate in an area of your house where you and your family spend a lot of time, such as the family room. Put a soft sleeping blanket or towel in the crate. Bring your dog over to the crate, and talk to him in an excited, happy tone of voice. Make sure that the door to the crate is securely fastened open so it won't accidentally hit your dog and frighten him.

Drop some small tidbits of food around the crate, just inside the door, and then gradually all the way inside the crate to encourage your dog to enter. If he doesn't go all the way in at first to get the food, that's okay. DO NOT force him to enter. Repeat this experience until your dog will calmly walk into the crate to obtain a piece of food. If your dog isn't interested in food, try tossing a favorite toy in the crate instead. This process may take just a few minutes or as long as several days.

STEP 2: FEEDING YOUR DOG IN THE CRATE

After your dog has been introduced to the crate, you can begin feeding him his regular meals near the crate for awhile. This will create pleasant associations with the crate and decrease any fear he has of the crate. If your dog is readily entering the crate when you begin Step 2, you can place the food dish all the way at the back of the crate. However, if your dog is still reluctant to enter the crate, then place the dish right in front of the open door or as far inside as he will readily go without becoming fearful or anxious. Each time you feed him, place the dish a little more toward the back of the crate.

Once your dog is comfortably eating his food while standing in the crate, you can close the door while he's eating. At first, open the door as soon as he finishes his meal, let him out, and praise him. With each succeeding feeding, leave the door closed a few minutes longer, until he is staying in the crate without protesting for 10 minutes or so after eating. If he begins to whine to be let out, you may have increased the duration of crating too quickly. Next time, try leaving him for a shorter time period. Be sure to release him from the crate when he is not whining or barking. If vocalizing results in release, the behavior will be reinforced and a problem will develop.

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 begin to confine him there for short periods while you are home. Begin by calling him over to the crate in return for a food reward. Give him a command to enter such as "kennel up." You can encourage him to do so by pointing to the inside of the crate with a tidbit in your hand. After your dog enters the crate, reward him with the tidbit and close the door. Sit quietly near the crate for 5 to 10 minutes and then go out of sight into another room for a few minutes. When you return, sit quietly again for a short time, and then release your dog. Repeat this procedure several times a day. With each repetition, gradually increase the length of time the dog is crated, and the length of time you are out-of-sight. Once your dog will quietly remain 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 are gone for short time periods, and/or letting him sleep there at night. It may take several days or several weeks to get him to this point.

STEP 4: CRATING WHEN LEFT ALONE & CRATING AT NIGHT

Crating when left alone: After your dog is spending about 30 minutes in the crate without becoming anxious or afraid while you are there, you can begin leaving him crated for short time periods when you leave the house. Put him in the crate with your regular "kennel up" or similar command. You will want to vary the point at which you put your dog in the crate during your "getting ready to leave" routine. Although he should not be crated for a long time before you leave, you can crate him anywhere from 5 to 20 minutes prior to leaving. DO NOT make leave-takings emotional and prolonged, but matter-of-fact instead. Praise your dog briefly and give him a tidbit for entering the crate, and then leave quietly. When you arrive at home, do not inadvertently reward your dog for excited behavior by responding to him in an excited, enthusiastic way. Keep arrivals very low key and reserve playful, excited greeting behavior for after he has been let outside and has calmed down somewhat. Continue to crate your dog for short periods from time to time when you are home so that he does not begin to associate crating with being left alone.

Crating at night: Follow the same procedure you have been using to encourage your dog to enter his crate willingly. Initially, it may be a good idea (especially if you have a young puppy) to locate the crate in your bedroom or nearby in a hallway. Puppies often need to go outside to eliminate during the night, and you'll want to be able to hear your puppy when he whines to be let outside. Older dogs too should initially be kept nearby so that crating does not become associated with social isolation. Once your dog is sleeping comfortably through the night with his crate near you, you can begin to gradually move it to the location you prefer.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

Whining:

If your dog whines or cries while in the crate at night, it may be difficult to decide whether he is whining to be let out of the crate or whether he needs to be let outside to eliminate. If you followed the training procedures, your dog should not have been reinforced in the past for whining by being released from his crate. Initially you can ignore the whining. Your dog may stop if he is just testing you. Yelling at him or pounding on the crate may only increase his vocalizations. If the whining continues after you have ignored it for several minutes you can repeat the phrase your dog has associated 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 are convinced that your dog does not need to eliminate, the best response is to ignore the whining until it stops. Most attempts at punishing the behavior actually end up inadvertently reinforcing it because the dog is getting attention from you. During the process of ignoring the whining, expect it to get worse before it gets better. You cannot give in, otherwise you will have taught your dog that he must whine loud and long to get what he wants! If you have progressed very gradually through the training steps and have not attempted to hurry the process and cut corners, you will not be likely to encounter this problem. If the problem becomes unmanageable, you may need to restart the crate training process from the very beginning.

Separation Anxiety:

If you are attempting to use the crate as a remedy for separation anxiety problem (your dog is anxious when left alone and becomes destructive, house soils, or vocalizes for long time periods) it will not be effective in resolving the underlying cause of the problem. It may physically prevent your dog from being destructive, but if he is still anxious at being left alone, he may injure himself in trying to escape from the crate, soil in the crate, or bark or whine all day. Separation anxiety problems can be resolved with counter conditioning and desensitization procedures. You may need to consult a certified animal behaviorist for help with this problem.