

# Crate Training

## Your Puppy or Dog

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When introduced properly the crate can be a wonderful place for puppies or dogs to hang out. Some reasons you might crate train include:

- preparing the puppy/dog for vet visits where they will be caged after surgery in the clinic or when crate rest at home is required.
- having somewhere to put a young pup when you cannot actively supervise them during the toilet training process
- giving your dog a quiet location that is just there's where they can go and not be bothered when things get a bit much e.g. a busy household or fireworks
- securing your dog when travelling in the car, on the ferry or in a plane.
- managing behavioural issues e.g. food guarding while working through a behaviour medication plan.
- restricting access to visitors while working on polite greetings.
- preventing door dashing when collecting courier packages.
- when you have babies or toddlers and need to secure your dog when you cannot supervise interactions.

The application and options for using a crate are endless so having a dog that is able to relax in a crate is well worth the investment in training.

**NOTE:** The crate is to be a positive place for the dog. It is not to be used as a punishment tool.

## Considerations:

### Choosing a Crate...

When choosing a crate for your puppy/dog you should consider not just the size of the crate (relative to your dog) but also the function it will serve.

#### Sizing

The size of the crate should be big enough for your dog to stand up, turn around and lay down in comfortably (when your dog is fully grown!).

If the crate is too big your puppy/dog may be able to eliminate at one end and easily sleep at the other end. Dogs are naturally predisposed to keeping their living area clean but a big enough crate allows them to divide the area into sleeping, eating and eliminating zones which is detrimental to toilet training.

Some crates come with wire dividers so that you can section off part of the crate for when they are puppies and gradually give them more room as they grow (thus removing the need to buy a bigger crate later on).

#### Types

There are two basic types, wire or plastic.

**Wire crates** are easily moved around the house, collapsed for travel or storage and provide the ability for the dog to be able to see what is going on around him.

**Plastic crates** (airline type carriers) have solid sides, tend to be a little sturdier but are bulkier and take up more room to store but are excellent for travel.

So it depends on your personal circumstances or aesthetic preferences.

## Set up for Success:

### Select the Perfect Place...

Once you've selected your crate where do you put it? Well that depends on when you might want to crate your dog. For example if you are crating your dog...

When you are sleeping, you will probably want to put the crate in your bedroom as being close to you will help to relieve stress and help your dog feel more comfortable in their crate.

Being near you over night means you will also be able to hear if your puppy becomes restless due to needing to relieve their bladder or bowels – so this can assist with house training.

You can move the crate further away from the bedroom over time if you wish but it's a good place to start getting them comfortable with it.

While you NOT at home, the crate should be in a cool, dim lighted and quiet area (as this helps to stimulate sleep cycles). Refer to the House Training Tip Sheet for using the crate while away from home and house training.

While you ARE at home, like when you are cooking dinner or have young children and cannot actively supervise your dog, then locate the crate in the family area where your dog can see you and are not isolated.

Having more than one crate may be more convenient if you do not want to have to move the crate around.

**NOTE:** The crate is somewhere to relax so don't use the crate to punish your dog or leave them in there for long periods of time (except for overnight) as they may not be able to hold on and may have an accident or become stressed.

## Start Training:

### First impressions last...

Your dog's first impressions of the crate are really important. Especially in the early stages of training all experiences between your dog and the crate must be positive and rewarding for them.

Allow them to approach the crate to investigate, calmly praise your dog if they show any interest in the crate and toss a few tasty treats inside to entice them to enter on their own (but don't force them to go in). The treats should be a really high value item like a small bit of hot dog or cheese, something they your dog really likes.

At this stage you are just encouraging your dog to investigate the crate so DO NOT CLOSE THE DOOR yet!

### Building up positive associations ...

You want your dog to have a positive association with the crate because if they do they are more likely and readily going to use it.

Some ways to help your dog build up positive associations with the crate include...

- playing with your dog and their favourite toy in or near the crate
- toss into the crate some special treats, when your dog is not looking, so that they randomly discover them in there

The important thing to remember is baby steps. Only once your dog feels comfortable around the crate and is willing to go into it, should you can start to move onto actually confining your dog in the crate.

### Confinement (door shut) training...

**Step 1.** Cut up lots of small pieces of easily eaten food that your dog really enjoys to reward your dog during training.

**Step 2.** To encourage your dog into the crate toss a piece of your high value food rewards into the crate or just wait for them to get in.

**Step 3.** Once your dog is in the crate calmly praise and reward your dog with a food reward.

**Step 4.** Continue to reward your dog with praise and food regularly if they remain in the crate.

**Step 5.** Before you think your dog wants to get out of the crate allow them to leave by giving a release cue like "okay" (which indicates they can now do whatever they like) and allow them to leave if they want to.

Repeat steps 1 to 5 in short sessions throughout the day. When they readily goes in and want to stay in the crate, then go to step 6.

**Step 6.** With your dog in the crate, start to fiddle with the door, moving it towards being closed (but not closed), and reward your dog along the way for calmly staying in the crate. Release the dog from the crate with "okay" and repeat. When they're comfortable go to step 7.

**Step 7.** Close the crate door for 1-2 seconds, then open it again, reward and release the dog.

**Step 8.** Repeat step 7 but increase the amount of time you wait before opening the door. Reward the dog for remaining calm throughout.

Once your dog happily goes in and stays in the crate while the door is shut, you can start extending the length of time your dog is in there and start working on leaving them alone in the crate. This can take days or weeks depending on the dog.

## Top Tips...

Give your dog a special stuffed chew toy (e.g. Kong) for them to enjoy in the crate with the door closed. Only leave them in the crate for as long as it takes to get the food out of the toy and open the door before they have finished.

Feed your dog their regular meals in the crate, closing the door behind them when they are eating but opening it back up again before they finish completely.

Don't let your dog out of the crate when they are whining (but do if they are panicking). If they fuss just wait for that small moment of silence before releasing them or you will be rewarding the crying and they will learn that this behaviour will work to be released.

Try leaving a TV or radio on to make him feel less alone or play something soothing (not too loud!). This will also help to block out background noise that may stimulate your dog to bark or feel nervous.

Try covering a wire crate with a blanket to create a cosier place when your dog is sleeping. It can also block their view from anything that may stimulate them to bark or feel nervous.

Practice low key hellos and goodbyes when leaving your dog in the crate and upon returning. Ask for a sit or wait for them to calm down before releasing them from the crate.

**NOTE:** If you think your dog is suffering from separation anxiety consult a professional before using a crate in case it may cause injury to your pet or intensify his phobic behaviour.

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