

How to: Crate Train Your Dog



Crate training your dog is important even if you do not plan on crating your dog on a regular basis. Here are some reasons to consider crate training your dog:

- Keeps your dog out of trouble when you are not around
- Keeps your guests comfortable (think about when you need to have service people over, or if you have friends or family who dislike dogs, or if you have a dog who goes a little overboard when greeting guests)
- Your dog will be prepared if you ever have to board him
- Makes it easier for you to clean the house or make dinner without your furry friend in your way
- Crating is a valuable tool in house training
- A crate can become a comfortable place to a dog. It can act as a den and give your dog a relaxing place to go when they want some alone time
- Crate training teaches your dog how to be alone, which in turn lessens anxiety when he is alone, as well as helping in prevent separation anxiety from developing in the future

The crate should be just big enough to stand up, turn around and lie down. You want to make sure the crate is a POSITIVE experience. Make it a relaxing and positive place. It is important to work with your dog to ensure he is comfortable and calm in the crate before leaving him there all day. If you just throw your dog in a crate every time you leave the house without working on crate training him first, the crate will become a negative, stressful place.

Start by putting the crate in a busy part of the house, where you and your family spend a lot of time (living room, kitchen, etc). This way he doesn't feel like he is being banished from the family when he is in his crate. Here are some ways to increase your dogs comfort level and to build a positive association with the crate:

- Feed your dog in the crate
- Reward your dog for exploring the crate on their own
- Throw a treat into the crate so your dog walks in on their own
- Practice sits, downs and stays with your dog while they're in the crate
- Put going into the crate on a cue and make a fun game out of it



If you have a dog who is anxious about being in a crate, save the extra special treats for crate training. As your dog gets more comfortable being in the crate, begin to close the door. Start by closing it for a second and then open it and reward. Gradually increase the amount of time you have the door closed, always rewarding heavily for calm behavior. Do not move too fast, especially with an anxious dog. You are trying to teach your dog the crate is not a bad place to be and that he will always be let back out.

Once your dog is comfortable with the door being closed, start leaving the room. The first couple times come right back, rewarding for calm behavior. Never return or open the door for your dog if he is barking or being anything other than calm. If your dog is having difficulty, go slower and spend more time on the items on the list above. As your dog becomes more and more comfortable being in the crate, increase the amount of time you are out of the room. If your dog is doing well, give it a Kong or rawhide and leave the room for even longer. You can close your dog in for a few hours while you are in the house to begin desensitizing him to being in there for long periods of time. You can start mimicking that you are leaving the house. Put your coat on, grab your keys, open the door, step out and come back in and let your dog out. Keep mimicking these actions, rewarding your dog frequently for calm behavior.

Some dogs really learn to love their crate and see it as their special place to relax and unwind. If you keep the crate a positive place your dog can get to this point too!

Crate Training Do's:

- Make sure there are no negative associations made with going in the crate (do not force or stuff the dog into the crate).
- Do 'touch' near the crate. (present your hand, palm facing the dog. When he touches his nose to your hand, say YES! And give him a treat).
- Practice sits and downs near the crate, varying where you toss his treat; sometimes away from the crate, other times in front of the crate, and sometimes place the treat just inside the crate.
- Make sure he downs and waits in the crate to be let out EVERY TIME.
- You may use the procedure to train "quiet" during these times, but ensure you follow the instructions to train the "quiet" cue to the letter.
- Do confine the dog intermittently while you are at home. Short fifteen minute confinement periods done every few hours while at home helps to teach the dog it is okay to be alone.

Crate Training Don'ts:

- Avoid exuberant greetings, or lavish good-byes. By giving your dog attention excitedly before leaving, or upon returning home, this helps feed separation anxiety. You may greet your dog after being home for five minutes, or when he calms down. Good-byes should not be more than a pat on the head, and should be done several minutes before leaving (a bone, stuffed kong, or some sort of chewy may be given before you depart).
- Do not give the dog any attention while he is barking (except when training the "quiet" cue), or let the dog out of the crate while he is barking or being anxious.

Training him to be alone in the crate, quietly:

- Put the dog in the crate, and shut the door.
- Start this exercise with him standing. When he starts to get this game, we will require a sit or down while we do this, but for now, standing is fine.
- CONTINUOUSLY treat him while he is quiet, with you standing directly in front of the crate.
- Take a step away from the crate, immediately return, and give him a treat AS LONG AS HE REMAINS QUIET!
- If he starts barking, ask for a sit (or down, preferably) in the crate. Say YES! And deliver a treat when he obeys and is quiet while doing so.

Continue this process:

Take one step away returning immediately. Give the dog a treat (drop the morsel through the top of the crate, or if he is in a down, pop one in through the bottom wires). Do this 10 times.

Take Two steps away from the crate, returning immediately to deliver a treat to your quiet dog. Repeat 10 times.

Take Three steps away from the crate returning immediately to deliver a treat. Repeat 10 times.

Repeat these steps until you are about to leave your dog's sight (don't go out of sight yet!)

When you can walk away from him in the crate until you are just about to go out of sight, change your routine to the following:

Prepare as before, with your dog in the crate. Take one step away, and remain there for ONE SECOND before returning to your dog to give him a treat for being quiet. Do this 10 times.

Prepare as before, taking one step away from his crate, this time remain there for TWO SECONDS before returning to his crate to reward him for being quiet. Repeat this 10 times.

Continue on in this manner, increasing next to 3 seconds, then 4 seconds, all the way up to 10 seconds, ONLY AT THE DISTANCE ONE STEP AWAY FROM THE CRATE.

Use this formula to increase your distance and time away from your dog in the crate. Each time you reach 10 seconds at a particular distance, go on to the next distance. (ie. You're at 10 seconds at 1 step away from the crate, then you move onto 2 steps away from the crate, but you start back at 1 second. Once you've moved onto 10 seconds at 2 steps from the crate, you move on to 3 steps away, but back down to 1 second.)

This teaches him that you WILL be back, with a tasty morsel if he is quiet. If at anytime he starts barking at you, ignore him until he is quiet. This could include you closing the door to the room on him, and only opening it if he is quiet (for 3 seconds), or stay where you are when he starts barking, and do not move until he is quiet.

