

# Pet Owner's Guide to Crate Training

## **What Is A Dog Crate?**

A dog crate is an enclosure with a top and a door, made in a variety of sizes to fit any type of dog. Constructed of wire, wood, metal, or molded plastic, its purpose is to provide confinement for security, safety, house breaking, protecting household goods, travel, illness, or general control.

The dog crate has long been accepted, trusted, and taken advantage of by dog show exhibitors, obedience and field trainers, competitors, trainers, breeders, groomers, and veterinarians. Some may be deterred from crate use if they mistake such close confinement as unfair or harmful.

## **Cruelty vs. Kindness**

Pet owners may initially feel that putting a dog in a crate is mean and inhumane. They may be worried that it would lead to resentment or psychological damage.

Fortunately, if used correctly, the crate can become a safe haven for a dog. Crates can act as the dog's personal space where they enjoy naps, meals, toys and treats. If trained well, dogs can be much happier and feel more secure in a crate and will have structure to prevent getting into trouble.

## **Why Use a Crate**

- Owners can enjoy complete peace of mind when leaving a dog home alone, knowing that nothing can be soiled or destroyed and that the dog is comfortable, protected, and not developing any bad habits.
- Crates can help housebreak a dog more quickly by using the close confinement to encourage control, establish a regular routine for outdoor elimination, and to prevent accidents when unsupervised.
- Crates can effectively confine a dog at times when it may be in the way, unwelcome, over-excited or ill.
- A dog can travel in a crate to eliminate risk of distraction or getting loose. Crates can also make it easier to adapt to strange surroundings during travel.
- Dogs will be able to retreat to a private and secure space when tired, stressed or ill.

## **Don't Overuse the Crate**

The use of a dog crate is NOT recommended for a dog that is regularly left alone all day. Some dogs may tolerate this but they need to be well exercised before and after crating, given lots of personal attention and be allowed freedom at night (including sleeping near his owner).

It is also most important that the crate be large enough to permit stretching and ample freedom of movement. The crate should also be equipped with a clip-on dish for water. Ideally, the dog should be let out once during the day to provide a period of attention and exercise.

In the case of a puppy, the crate must be used strictly as a "play-pen" for general confinement, having plenty of space for a cozy box for sleeping at one end and papers for elimination at the other, and a clip-on dishes for water and food. Although a puppy can be raised in this manner, the limited human interaction may result in poorly developed social skills and difficulty housebreaking and training.

## **Types of Crates**

The most practical dog crate is the collapsible wire mesh type, available in a variety of sizes. Lightweight and easily handled, it allows total ventilation and permits the dog to see everything. A wooden, metal, or plastic airline crate will serve the same purpose, but it restricts air and vision and is less convenient to handle, transport and store.

## **Sizing**

Crates should be large enough to permit a dog to stretch out flat on its side and to sit up. For a fully grown adult dog, measure the distance from the tip of the nose to the base of the tail and find a crate close to, or longer than this length. The height and width of most crates are properly proportioned to the length.

For a puppy, measure from nose to tail, then add about 12 inches for anticipated growth. If a small crate is unavailable for temporary use, restrict the space available in an adult sized crate.

A crate too large for a young puppy defeats its purpose of providing security and promoting bowel control, so space should always be limited in the beginning.

## **Purchasing a Crate**

New crates can be purchased in retail pet shops and discount pet food/supplies outlets, through large catalog sales firms, at the larger dog shows, from dog equipment catalogs, or from a crate manufacturer; prices depend on size, quality, and make.

## **Location**

Since one of the main reasons for using a crate is to confine a dog without feeling isolated or banished, it should be placed in an area close to people like the kitchen or family room. It should be located in a corner or have the sides and back loosely draped with a sheet, large towel, or light blanket.

## **Crating a Puppy**

A young puppy (8-16 weeks) should normally have no problem accepting a crate as his "own place." Any whining at first is caused not by the crate, but by the puppy learning to accept the controls of his unfamiliar new environment. A crate can help a puppy adapt more easily and quickly its new surroundings.

## **Introducing a Crate to a Puppy**

Place the crate near people and in an area away from cold drafts and heat sources. Use an old towel or blanket that can be washed and an unlaundered article of clothing for comfort. Avoid newspaper in or under the crate since its odor may encourage elimination. Feed your young puppy meals in the crate to make it a personal nest and a rewarding space.

Make it clear to children that the crate is NOT a play area for them, and that the puppy's rights should be recognized and respected. However, you should accustom the puppy to letting you in the crate at any time to avoid overprotection or aggression.

Establish a routine - close the puppy in at regular 1-2 hour intervals during the day, whenever the puppy must be left alone, and during any period that there is no supervision. Remove collars with tags that could become caught in the crate.

At night, you may place the crate with the door left open and newspapers nearby, in an enclosed area like a bathroom. Whining and barking is easier to ignore if you know that the puppy is comfortable. Once adjusted, the

puppy may be crated all night in the normal location. If training doesn't go well at first, don't give up. Be firm and confident that you are doing the best thing your pet by preventing any trouble while unsupervised.

Increase the space in the crate as the puppy grows. It should at least be used for at least 5 or 6 months or until the dog is past its teething phase. You can start leaving the crate door open at night or when briefly unsupervised. If this goes well and the dog seems trustworthy when alone, you can remove the crate but leave bedding in the same location. That area will have become his and good habits should continue. If any problems occur, using a crate again may be necessary.

## **Introducing a Crate to an Adult**

Many problem behaviors of an older puppy or an adult dog are caused by separation anxiety. Although a crate can fulfill the need of security, it must be introduced gradually. The dog's first association with a crate must be positive and pleasant regardless of age.

Borrow or rent a crate of adequate size. Place it in a location where the dog will feel close to the family and still have some privacy. Secure the door open so it can't unexpectedly shut, and do not use bedding. Encourage the dog to investigate the crate by tossing in an enticing treat and letting the dog go in and come back out. Use a lot of praise.

When the dog begins to enter the crate confidently, place bedding inside and let him to lie down and relax. Continue this for several days, letting the dog use the crate as much as possible and shutting the door briefly while you are visible and/or audible. Meet resistance with consistent firmness and authority so that the dog is clearly aware of the behavior you desire.

## **Do Crates Always Work?**

No. Most pet owners can use a crate successfully but there are some dogs that will not tolerate this form of confinement. This reaction is not as common with a young puppy as with an adult dog.

In some cases, a dog will use a crate readily as long as the door remains open, but will object if it is closed or if left alone. It should be stressed that these reactions represent the exception not the rule, and that most dogs can be successfully trained to use a crate.

