

Dog: Crate Training Your Adult Dog



Benefit

A crate is a terrific investment for a number of reasons. A crate can help you with:

Housetraining: Prompts your dog to hold it when unsupervised.

Chew training: Stops your dog from chewing anything except legitimate chew toys.

Settling: Teaches your dog to settle down when alone and inactive.

Kenneling: Your dog may need to stay in a crate during travel or a hospital visit.

What You Need

- A crate large enough for your dog to stand up and turn around in—but no larger. Otherwise he might be tempted to use one end as a bathroom and the other as a bed.
- A fluffy crate pad or blanket to make the crate comfortable.
- A high-traffic area such as the kitchen in which to place the crate.
- Yummy treats, toys, and a KONG® for stuffing with meals and snacks.

How to Train It

First, you need to give your dog a chance to get used to the crate. You can't just throw him in there and hope he adjusts; that would be traumatic for most dogs. The crate should be a comfy, safe place he loves to spend time in. Here's how to make your dog feel great about his crate:

PHASE 1: THE FIRST DAY

1. Begin crate training the day you bring home your new dog. At times when your dog isn't looking, drop a few treats into the crate. Don't point them out to him; let him discover the goodies on his own.
2. Feed your dog his meal in the crate using a stuffed KONG. Use heavy string to tie it to the back of the crate, so your dog has to eat it in there. Continue feeding your dog all his meals in the crate until he's fully crate trained.

PHASE 2: THE NEXT FEW DAYS

1. Start teaching your dog to enter the crate on command. Say "into bed" or "into the crate," throw in a treat, and then praise as your dog goes in and eats the treat. Repeat this many times.
2. Next, switch the order around: First say 'into bed,' then wait for your dog to go in before throwing the treat. Don't give the command twice and don't crack and throw the treat in. If he doesn't go in, end the training session.
3. Try another session a little later. Still withhold the reward until your dog goes in on his own. When he does (hang in there; they all go in eventually), give him a double reward and do a few more reps.

When your dog is happily going into the crate on command, it's time to move on to Phase 3.

PHASE 3: CLOSING THE DOOR

1. Give your dog the command to enter the crate. This time, close the door and feed him treats through the grate for a minute or two before opening the door. Do this several times.

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2. Then practice walking around the crate and around the room while your dog is locked inside. Occasionally, throw him a treat. After a couple of minutes, open the door and let him out.
3. Now we add duration. Stuff a KONG with something extra-special and put on a favorite movie. Set the crate up next to the couch. Tell your dog to go into the crate. When he does, give him the KONG, close the crate door, and start the movie. Leave the room a few times, but come back within a minute or so. Ignore any noise or tantrums from your dog. At the end of the movie, if your dog is quiet and settled in the crate, open the door. Don't let your dog out when pawing the door or barking. When you do open the door, don't rush; have him sit then let him exit.
4. Several times throughout the day, tell him to get right back in for a treat or two without closing the door.
5. Spend a few days practicing locking your dog in the crate while you're at home, going about your usual business. Ignore any noise and provide interesting chew toys each time. When your dog is going in without fuss and no longer whines or barks, you can start leaving the house.

PHASE 4: LEAVING THE HOUSE

1. In the first session, leave the house many times over for 1 to 10 seconds.
2. Over the next few sessions, gradually extend the time you're gone. Go from 1 minute to 5 minutes to 10, 15, 30, 1 hour, then 2, 3, and 4 hours. Throw in short absences (5 to 60 seconds) to mix it up.

Do's and Don'ts

DO: Leave without any fanfare; return home without any fanfare.

DO: Tire your dog out with vigorous exercise and training before longer absences.

DON'T: Use the crate in your day-to-day-life until you have conditioned your dog to the crate slowly and thoroughly.

DON'T: Use the crate for punishment time outs.

Troubleshooting

If your dog is going to the bathroom in his crate:

- Review how long you leave your dog in the crate—it might be longer than he can hold.
- Take out the crate pad or blanket. The absorbent material might be prompting him to go.
- Keep both your dog and the crate scrupulously clean.
- Take your dog to the vet for a medical checkup.

If you can't get your dog to stop soiling his crate, call us for pointers.

Tips

- If you have a video camera or webcam, use it to monitor your dog's comfort level while in the crate. Look out for signs of discomfort, such as prolonged pawing or chewing.
- Track your success with longer and longer absences, making sure no problems are arising.
- If at any point your dog is hurting himself in the crate by trying to escape don't use a crate.