

Crate Training Your Dog

Just as you would not leave a two-year old child alone in your house, nor should you leave your dog unsupervised until he is completely trained. A dog left alone will make choices. Choices like... "where should I urinate?" and "should I chew up the rug or play with my toys?" Dogs under 2 years of age, as well as older dogs having difficulty with house training or destructive chewing, are excellent candidates for crate training. If you have just brought your new dog home, it is critical that you start crate training the first day. Establishing a regular schedule and getting your dog accustomed to being alone are important for his mental adjustment.

The key to protecting your home and your dog is **prevention**. By successfully crate training your dog you're able to prevent him from learning inappropriate behavior in your house. The concept of crating is simple: dogs possess a denning instinct. Their crate (if introduced properly) can quickly become their "room" or the place they can go to feel secure. Dogs also don't like to eliminate where they sleep, so the crate is an effective house training tool. Dogs of any age can learn to enjoy a crate, as long as you're patient and make your dog's crating experience pleasant right from the start.

First, be sure your dog's crate is the right size. Crates should be *just* large enough for the dog to stand up, turn around and lie down comfortably. If it's too big, your dog may urinate in one corner and lay in the other, making house training more difficult. Next, make sure to put the crate in a high-traffic area so the dog is not isolated when put in his crate. Once you've got the size and location of the crate all set, its time to begin getting your dog used to the crate.

Teaching Your Dog to Like the Crate

- Open the door to the crate and drop a small food treat in the middle of the crate. Praise the dog when he retrieves the treat and allow him to exit the crate as he chooses. Keep the door open and practice until the dog is happily entering the crate to get the treat.
- Repeat the above exercise only this time drop the food treat all the way to the back of the crate. The goal is to teach your dog to relate the crate with good things!
- Feed your dog his meals in the crate, placing the bowl all the way in the back. If he won't go in the crate, wait him out even if he skips a meal or two. When your dog is hungry he will eat in the crate.
- Next, give your dog his favorite chew toy in the crate. A Kong Toy stuffed with peanut butter, cheese spread or moist dog food works well. Toss it toward the back of the crate and close the door briefly. Gradually increase the amount of time the door is closed. If he wants to stay inside and play with his toy, great!

Tips for Successful Crate Training

By following these steps, you should be well on your way to a dog who is comfortable in his crate with the door closed. While you're practicing, keep the following tips in mind:

- ***Crates are never used for punishment.*** Used properly, a dog is crated **before** he is able to chew a table leg. Never crate your dog after correcting him for inappropriate behavior. He will develop a negative association with the crate and won't learn anything except to dislike his crate.
- Use praise effectively. Praise your dog for going into the crate and for staying in it quietly. When you let him out, don't give him praise or treats. It should be a big deal to go into the crate and stay there and insignificant to leave.
- Never give your dog treats or attention for barking or whining in the crate, and never let him out while he is vocalizing. If you do, he may make a connection between vocalizing and getting what he wants.
- Puppies under four months of age cannot physically hold urine in their bladders for eight hours. If you're crate training a young puppy, make arrangements for someone to let him out every four hours.
- Refrain from placing blankets or towels in the crate until your dog is completely house trained. Dogs can learn to urinate on the blanket left in their crate and push it into the corner so they don't have to sit in urine. This makes house training more difficult.
- Don't leave food and water in the crate when you're gone. Remember: what goes in, must come out. If your dog has free access to food and water the entire time you're gone, but doesn't have the ability to eliminate until you come home he may be forced to eliminate in the crate.
- It's important to crate your dog while you are home as well as when you are gone. If your dog is in a high activity room, he can be with the family and in his crate at the same time. That way, he won't learn to associate the crate with being left alone.
- Remove any constricting collar before putting your dog in the crate.
- Watch for signs of separation anxiety. Some dogs "over" bond to their owners and panic when left alone. These dogs should not be crated. Some signs of separation anxiety include:
 - ✓ Urinating or defecating only when you're gone
 - ✓ Destruction focused around doors/windows
 - ✓ Excessive vocalizing
 - ✓ Self mutilation (raw nose or broken nails)
 - ✓ Excessive salivating

The Kentucky Humane Society offers a variety of classes, seminars and private training opportunities designed to teach your dog manners, resolve problem behaviors, strengthen the bond between you and your pet, and ultimately ensure a lasting and **enjoyable** relationship. Please call (502) 366-3355 today for more information!