

# BEHAVIOR Training

## Kentucky Humane Society

### **CRATE TRAINING: An Ounce of Prevention**

Crate training is a great way to keep your dog, and your home, safe when you cannot adequately supervise Fido. Think of the crate as a prevention tool, similar to a play pen for a toddler. Left to his own devices, your dog is going to make choices about what he should chew, where he should go to the bathroom, etc. If you are not there to supervise and provide direction, especially with a new or young dog, you might not like the choices he makes. The crate, when properly introduced, provides a safe place that keeps your dog out of trouble. To become a safe, positive space where your dog is happy and comfortable, the crate must be introduced properly and must never be used for punishment.

#### **Selecting a Crate**

- A crate should be just big enough so that your dog can comfortably stand up (with their head extended), turn around, and lie down.
- Crates come in a variety of makes and models, each has benefits and drawbacks. For example, plastic crates are more portable and lighter-weight, but are more confining and can make dogs feel slightly more isolated. Wire crates offer the best air flow and visibility for your dog, but they are bulky and heavy. Fabric crates are intended for short term use when supervised by humans only.
- If you have a puppy you don't need to buy a new crate at each growth spurt. Instead, buy the crate your dog will need when he is full grown, and use a box or divider to block part of the crate making the floor space the appropriate size for the size of your puppy now. Move the divider as he grows.

Now that you have the correct crate, you have to decide where to put it. The crate should be located in a common area of the home where the family often is like the family room or the kitchen. If the crate is down in the basement where the family never goes, it will be too isolating to the dog and it will feel like punishment. If you don't want to spend a lot of time in that location, your dog probably doesn't either.

#### **The Crate Training Process**

Crate training is a process that starts by slowly introducing your dog to the crate and gradually builds the amount of time he can be left alone in the crate.

##### **Step 1: Teaching Your Dog to Like the Crate**

- Place a soft pad or blanket in the crate so it's comfortable for your dog.
- Sit by the crate with some yummy treats and encourage your dog to come over for the treats and check out the crate.
- Once he is comfortable hanging around the crate, drop a few treats just inside the door so he has to stick his head in slightly to get the treat.
- Gradually move the treats further back into the crate until your dog readily walks in and out of the crate without hesitation.
- NEVER force your dog to enter the crate! This will only make the crate very scary.
- Getting your dog comfortable walking in and out of the crate may take a few minutes or a few days. You can't rush this part of the training.

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##### **Step 2: Teaching Your Dog to Stay in the Crate**

- Now that your dog will readily trot in and out of the crate, it's time to start getting him to stay inside it for very short periods of time.
- Toss the treat inside and when he goes in close the door. Drop additional treats in while the door is closed. Open the door after just a few seconds. You always want to open the door and let your dog out of the crate before he is really ready to get out at this stage. Gradually increase the amount of time he can stay in the crate with the door closed.
- If your dog is happy in the crate for a minute or two, you can feed your dog in the crate.
- Ask your dog to get in the crate, or use a food treat to get him in, and give him a fantastic long lasting chew toy like a Kong or goodie bone stuffed with treats.
- At this stage you are staying in the presence of your dog while he is in the crate.

### **Step 3: Leaving Your Dog in the Crate**

- Ask your dog to get in the crate and give him the stuffed Kong/goodie bone.
- Walk out of the room for a few minutes, returning before the stuffed bone is finished.
- Gradually increase the amount of time you are out of the room.
- Once you can leave your dog in the crate for at least an hour with you in another room of the house, you are ready to leave the house with the dog in the crate.
- The first time you leave; only walk outside for a few minutes.
- If you can walk outside, try a quick drive around the block. If that is successful, try a 30 minute errand. Gradually build up the amount of time you are gone.

### **Troubleshooting**

- Keep in mind that puppies cannot hold their bladder for long periods (see House Training handout). Your puppy should never be confined to a crate for longer than they can reasonably and comfortably hold their bladder.
- Too much time in the crate will make your dog feel frustrated, isolated and bored. Being crated all day while you are at work and all night while you are sleeping is too much time in the crate. As a general rule, dogs should not spend more than 5-6 hours a day in their crate. If you need to crate them for an entire work day, arrangements should be made for a mid-day potty and stretch break.
- If your dog is soiling the crate then you are probably leaving them in it for too long, or not making sure they have eliminated prior to going into the crate, or you could be dealing with separation anxiety (see below).
- If your dog is whining in the crate, particularly if you have a puppy, it might be hard to know if he is whining because he needs to use the bathroom, or if he is just whining because he doesn't like the crate. If your dog generally likes the crate and doesn't whine, you can cue him with his outside potty word and take him out for a bathroom break. He should go right back in the crate after he has eliminated. Keep this outing very business-like. If your dog is whining to be let out of the crate, the best defense is to ignore the whining. Only a quiet dog can be let out of the crate. When the dog is whining, if you tell him to be quiet, or continue to walk to the crate, etc, he will learn that whining gets him lots of attention. And if you give in after ten minutes of whining and let them out of the crate, you just taught them to whine longer and louder and eventually you will open the door!

### **Separation Anxiety**

Separation Anxiety is a complex emotional issue that can occur when dogs are insecure about being left alone. Crating a dog with separation anxiety usually only makes the anxiety worse and your dog might injure himself attempting to escape from the crate. Signs of separation anxiety include vocalization, elimination when left alone, destruction particularly in exit paths, and many others. If your dog exhibits the signs of separation anxiety, please contact a positive reinforcement trainer who is well-versed in dealing with the complexities of separation anxiety cases.