

HOUSE-SAFETY AND CRATE TRAINING

Why do dogs need to be confined?

Dogs are highly social animals that make wonderful pets. They can be effective as watchdogs, are excellent companions for play and exercise, and are sources of affection and comfort. However, with the lifestyle and schedule of the majority of families, dogs must learn to spend a portion of the day at home, while their human family is away at school, work, shopping or recreational activities. During those times when you are away and unavailable to supervise, the pet may still feel the need to chew, play, explore, eat, or eliminate.



How can this misbehavior be prevented?

Preventing such inappropriate behaviors when you are absent involves both scheduling and prevention. Scheduling means insuring that the pet has had the opportunity to play, eat, and eliminate before you leave it in its confinement area or crate. Prevention involves keeping the pet in a confined area where it is secure, safe, and can do no damage to itself or your possessions.

What are my options for confinement?

Depending on the structure of your home, it may be possible to dog-proof the house by closing a few doors, or putting up some child gates or barricades. The dog can then be allowed access to the remaining areas of the house. Another option is to use avoidance devices that keep the pet away from selected areas using motion detectors, citronella spray collars or other forms of “booby-traps” (see our handout on ‘Behavior management products’). If this dog-proofing is not possible when you have to leave, confine the dog to a single room, pen, or crate. This smaller confinement area not only provides safety for the dog and protection of the home from damage, but also provides a means of teaching the dog what it is supposed to chew, and where it is supposed to eliminate.

Isn't crate training cruel?

Crate training is neither cruel nor unfair. On the contrary, leaving the dog unsupervised to wander, investigate, destroy, and perhaps injure itself is far more inhumane than confinement. Ensure that the crate is large enough so the dog gets sufficient food, play, exercise and attention before it is confined, and you return before the dog needs to urinate or defecate.

What are the benefits of crate training?

The two most important benefits are the safety it affords the pet, and the damage that is prevented. The cage also provides a place of security; a comfortable retreat where the dog can relax, sleep, or chew on a favorite toy. Behavior problems can be immediately prevented by confining the pet to a crate or room, when the owner is not available to supervise. When you are at home, supervision and rewards can be used to prevent undesirable behavior, and to teach the dog where to eliminate, what to chew, and what rooms and areas are “out of bounds.”

Will cage confinement help with house-training?

Yes. Crate training is one of the quickest and most effective ways to house-train a dog. Since most dogs instinctively avoid eliminating in their sleeping and eating areas, dogs that use their crate as a bed or “den” will seldom eliminate inside unless they have been left in the crate for too long. Crate training can also help teach the dog to develop control over its elimination (see our handout on ‘Puppy – getting started and house training guide’).

As soon as your dog is released from its crate, take it to the designated area and reward elimination at acceptable locations. Since the crate prevents chewing, digging, and elimination on the owner’s home and property, owners of crate trained puppies have fewer behavior concerns, the puppy receives far less discipline and punishment, and the overall relationship between pet and owner can be dramatically improved.

Will the crate provoke barking?

No. The crate can also be a useful way to reduce or eliminate distress barking. Rather than locking the puppy up and away from the owners at night time or during mealtime, the puppy can be housed in its crate in the bedroom or kitchen. In this way the puppy cannot get into mischief, and is less likely to cry out or vocalize, if the owners are in the room. If the puppy is locked away in a laundry room or basement with no access to the owners, distress vocalization is far more likely. If the owner then goes to the puppy to quiet it down or check it out, the crying behavior is rewarded.

What about caging and travel?

Of course, throughout its life, whether traveling or boarding, the dog may require crate confinement. Those dogs that are familiar and comfortable with caging are more likely to feel secure, and far less stressed, should caging be required.

PUPPY CRATE TRAINING

What type of crate or confinement area works best?

A metal, collapsible crate with a tray floor works well, as long as the crate is large enough for the dog to stand, turn, and stretch out. Some dogs feel more secure if a blanket is draped over the crate. A plastic traveling crate or a homemade crate can also be used. Playpens or barricades may also be successful as long as they are indestructible and escape proof.

Where should the cage be located?

Because dogs are social animals, an ideal location for the crate is a room where the family spends time such as a kitchen, den, or bedroom rather than an isolated laundry or furnace room.

How can crating or confinement become a positive experience?

Most dogs quickly choose a small area, such as a corner of a room, in a dog bed, or on or under a couch, where they go to relax. The key to making the crate the dog's favorite retreat and sleeping area, is to associate the crate with as many positive and relaxing experiences and stimuli as possible (food, treats, chew toys, bedding) and to place the dog in its cage only at scheduled rest and sleep periods. You must therefore be aware of the dog's schedule, including its needs for exploration, play, food, and elimination, so that the dog is only placed in its cage, when each of these needs is fulfilled. You must then return to the dog to release it from its cage before the next exercise, feeding or elimination period is due.

A radio or television playing in the background may help to calm the dog when it is alone in its cage, especially during the daytime. These may also help to mask environmental noises that can stimulate the dog to vocalize.

The crate should never be used as punishment.

How do I crate-train my new puppy?

- 1) Introduce the puppy to the crate as soon as it is brought home and as early in the day as possible. Place a variety of treats in the cage throughout the day so that the puppy is encouraged to enter voluntarily. Food, water, toys and bedding could also be offered to the puppy in the open cage.
- 2) Choose a location outdoors for the puppy to eliminate. Take the puppy to the location, wait until the puppy eliminates, and reward the puppy lavishly with praise or food. After some additional play and exercise, place the puppy in its crate with water, a toy and a treat and close the door.
- 3) If the puppy is tired and calm, it may take a "nap" shortly after being placed in its crate.
- 4) Leave the room but remain close enough to hear the puppy. Escape behavior and vocalization are to be expected when a dog is first placed into its crate. If the "complaints" are short or mild, ignore your puppy until the crying stops. Never release the puppy unless it is quiet. This teaches that quiet behavior, and not crying will be rewarded. Release the puppy after a few minutes of quiet or a short nap.
- 5) Punishment may be useful to deter crying if it does not subside on its own. A shaker can (a sealed can filled with coins or marbles) can be tossed at the crate when the pup barks. Other methods include water sprayers or alarms (audible or ultrasonic). The owner should remain out of sight. By plugging in an alarm, tape recorder, water pik, or hair dryer beside the crate and turning it on with a remote control switch each time the dog barks, the dog can be taught that barking leads to punishment whether the owner is present or not. When the barking ceases, the punishment is stopped. Bark collars and alarms or water sprayers that are activated by the barking are also available for persistent problems. Punishment must always be used with caution, since it can exacerbate the vocalization problem of a very anxious pet.



- 6) Repeat the cage and release procedure a few more times during the day before bedtime. Place the puppy in its crate a few times before the end of the day. Each time, increase the time that the dog must stay in the crate before letting it out. Always give the puppy exercise and a chance to eliminate before locking it in the crate.
- 7) At bedtime, the dog should be exercised, locked in its crate, and left for the night. Do not go to the dog if it cries. Remote punishment can be used to deter crying. Alternately, the crate can be kept in the bedroom.
- 8) If the pup sleeps in one end of its crate and eliminates in the other, a divider can be installed to keep the puppy in a smaller area.
- 9) Never leave the puppy in its crate for longer than it can control itself or it may be forced to eliminate in the crate.
- 10) If the pup must be left for long periods during which it might eliminate, it should be confined to a larger area such as a dog-proof room or pen, with paper left down for elimination. As the puppy gets older, its control increases and it can be left longer in its crate.
- 11) Although there is a great deal of individual variability, many puppies can control themselves through the night by 3 months of age. During the daytime, once the puppy has relieved itself, a 2-month old puppy may have up to 3 hours control, a 3-month puppy up to 4 hours, and a 4 month old puppy up to 5 hours.
- 12) A crate is not an excuse to ignore the dog!

CRATE TRAINING ADULT DOGS

What is the best technique for crate training older pets and adult dogs?

- 1) For adult dogs or older puppies that have not been crate trained previously, set up the crate in the dog's feeding area with the door open for a few days. Place food, treats, and water in the crate so that the dog enters the crate on its own. Another alternative is to place the crate in the dog's sleeping area with its bedding. Once the dog is entering the crate freely, it is time to close the door.
- 2) Using the same training techniques as for 'sit' and 'stay' training, have the dog enter its crate for short periods of time to obtain food, treats, or chew toys. Once the pet expects treats each time it enters the crate, train the dog to enter the crate on command (e.g. kennel!), and have the dog remain in the kennel for progressively longer periods of time, before the dog is allowed to exit. Give small rewards each time the dog enters the cage at first, and give the dog a favored chew toy or some food to help make the stay more enjoyable. At first, the door can remain open during these training sessions.
- 3) When the dog is capable of staying comfortably and quietly in the crate begin to lock the dog in the crate at nighttime. Once the dog sleeps in the crate through the night, try leaving the pet in the crate during the daytime. Try short departures first, and gradually make them longer.



Is crate training practical for all dogs?

An occasional dog may not tolerate crate training, and may continue to show anxiety, or even eliminate when confined. These dogs may adapt better to other types of confinement such as a pen, dog run, small room, or barricaded area. Of course, if the dog is being left alone for longer than it can control (hold in) its elimination, it will be necessary to provide an area much larger than a cage, so that the pet has a location on which to eliminate, away from its food and bedding.

Continued anxiety, destruction or vocalization when placed in the crate may indicate separation anxiety. The intervention of a behaviorist may be needed.