

Crate Training 101

by DorothyBelle Poli

If you just got a puppy, start off on the right foot with training. If you just adopted a homeless dog, a crate may be a good way to teach proper house manners and give the dog a place to call their own!

Step 1: How big your dog is should dictate what size crate you will get. Note that a crate should be big enough for the dog to stand up and turn around. You do not want the crate to be too big or too small since it is dangerous or uncomfortable respectively. Finally, a puppy will need different a crate as he grows bigger. This transition should be smooth if done properly from the beginning!

Step 2: You should consider what material the crate should be: metal, plastic airline type, or a combination of materials. This decision should take into consideration the strength of the dog, how much of a chewer he is, how easily he may overheat, or if the dog is easily excited. For example, a strong dog easily excited, and who is not a big chewer would do ok in an airline type of carrier. For dogs that chew or overheat easily, a wire/metal cage is best!

Step 3: Buy a crate and bring it home by making a big fuss about its presence in the house. This will excite the dog about it rather than cause a fear reaction. Call the dog over to investigate it and reinforce and reward this behavior with treats and praise.

Step 4: Convince the dog to enter the crate 24 hours later by tossing toys into it. Keep up this activity until the dog enters the crate without reluctance. Be patient, it may take days to get over this task!

Step 5: A dog should want to use their crate as a wild dog uses their den. This space should be “their space” and therefore the door should be open and the crate should be privately located. Slowly work on shutting the door. For example once the dog enters the crate on his or her own, shut the door for a few seconds without locking it. Build up to locking the door for a minute, ½ hour, 1 hour, etc. NEVER keep your dog in the crate for more than 8 hours. Encourage good behavior with treats and praise.

Step 6: When you let the dog out of the crate, teach him its no big deal! This behavior is for everyone’s safety and to ensure the dog thinks of the crate as his den rather than his jail. To do this, open the door and calmly ignore him. After a few minutes, give your dog a pat and a treat and tell him “good boy.”

Step 7: To continue to encourage proper crate usage use toys. A special “crate only” toy can be given EVERY time the dog is in the crate. ONLY give this toy when the dog’s in the crate. Make sure the toy is safe for long periods of time (see the Toy Guide Article).

Step 8: When the dog is comfy with being in the crate for an hour, it is time to teach the dog to sleep in the crate. The dog may cry and bark but don’t give in completely. Go in

and reassure the dog it is ok if he cries for an hour. Make sure he doesn't have to go potty!

Step 9: Especially important for puppies but also for adults – DO NOT only put the dog into the crate when you leave the house. Put the dog into the crate for several minutes while you are home, too, otherwise the dog will associate the crate with your leaving and may not want to use their crate. Another good time to use the crate is during dinner to discourage begging at the table and your desires to feed table scraps!

Step 10: NEVER use the crate as punishment. This makes the dog associate the space as a bad thing and he will stop using the crate all together!

Remember, be patient. Do not rush any of the steps. Some dogs love their crates right from the start while others need time to adjust. Others will never use a crate!