



Crate Training

What is Crate Training?

Often when we have new dog owners, they might say that their dog is crate trained, or that they would like their dog to be crate trained. However, we often find that this can have several different meanings.

Here are just a few of the things that people believe is crate training:

- Potty training
- Appropriate behaviors in the crate
- Going into the crate on command
- Knowing not to rush out of the crate when the door is opened
- Being calm in the crate
- Staying in the crate when unsupervised

Thankfully, the overall concept of crate training should include all of the various versions of crate training into one wholistic view of the crate and its various benefits!

Why is the Crate so Important?

The crate is a simple and effective way of managing your dogs behaviors when you are not able to actively supervise them. Our dogs are constantly learning throughout their entire day and throughout their lives.

When dogs are confined to the crate, we essentially limit what behaviors they can and cannot perform. When dogs are prevented from rehearsing and repeating problem behaviors, such as peeing on the carpet, chewing on shoes, or stealing food off of the counters, this can greatly reduce the dogs attempts to perform those behaviors.

When should the Crate be Used?

The crate can be an immensely beneficial tool that can be used throughout the dog's entire life. However, there are some circumstances and learning periods where the crate offers specifically more crucial learning benefits.

Critical Training Periods with the Crate

Potty Training

Potty training a new or young dog can be challenging for many inexperienced dog owners. All too often we discover that our dog has had an accident well after the event has occurred. We may have even had several more fun and enjoyable activities with our dog between the time the accident happened and when we discovered it.

This situation makes it exceptionally difficult to teach the dog that the behavior of going to the bathroom on the floor is unacceptable or inappropriate when so much time has passed.

The crate is used to manage the space that your new dog can occupy between opportunities to go potty outside. Using the appropriately sized crate during potty training is very important.

When the dog has limited space to stand, sit, and lie down, this greatly discourages them from going to the bathroom in their crate. In this way, the crate is used to teach the dog to hold their bladder and bowels until their next potty opportunity.

Acclimating to New Environments

So you just brought home your new dog from the shelter or the breeder and you don't want them to get into any trouble. You are not expected to be able to supervise your dog 24 hour per day, so the crate gives you the ability to give your new dog the ability to rest and it gives you the confidence that your new dog won't be getting into mischief when you aren't paying attention.

Maybe you've had your dog for a long time and now you and your family are moving into a new home, or even traveling to visit friends and family. Moving into a new environment can be very challenging for a dog. The crate can provide a familiar space that provides them some comfort as well as providing you the confidence that they will not be misbehaving when unsupervised.

Recovery and Rest

Did you know that dog's need rest too? Did you know that sometimes our dogs may need rest, but will not choose to rest on their own?

If you have ever had a dog that incurred an injury or an illness, you may be familiar with the term "crate rest." The crate is useful in managing your dog's activity levels.

Resting is important following an injury or during an illness. It is also an important part of their daily routine. Dogs should rest during critical times of the day, such as following a meal, after drinking lots of water, or after strenuous exercise.

Behavioral Modification

When you were young, where you ever put in “Time Out” or sent to your room? There is a misconception that if the crate is used for punishment that you may create a negative association with the crate. However, if a child is sent to their room, it doesn’t make them hate their room, right?

The purpose of this guide is going to be how to help your dog enjoy their crate, but also how to use it to improve your dog’s behaviors. In certain situations, the crate may be less enjoyable in the context of whatever behavior the dog was enjoying when they were in trouble.

Even if the dog generally likes or loves their crate, in comparison to chasing the cat, or stealing a turkey dinner off of the counter, the crate is likely not nearly as fun. Using the crate as a kind of “Time Out” for inappropriate behavior can be very effective.

Continued Exposure and Canine Introductions

When introducing two dogs for the first time, this can be a very tenuous situation that can possibly turn dangerous very quickly. Using a process of continued exposure, you can deliberately and gradually expose the dogs to each other in a controlled manner that can prevent negative interactions.

The crate is a great way to control how much exposure the dogs get, and what happens when the dogs are exposed to each other. Using continued exposure for an extended period of time before officially introducing the dogs to each other can reduce the intensity of their first meeting and reduce the likelihood of a problematic introduction or dog fight.

Training Periods

Using the crate can make any training you do with your dog much more efficient. It can often take a long time to teach your dog new behaviors, but using the crate between training sessions actually helps your dog learn and retain new information more effectively.

Our dogs can only learn a limited amount each day. And like we mentioned previously, our dogs are constantly learning throughout their entire day. By limited

what our dogs can do between training sessions, we make sure that their mind is solely focused on the training behaviors that we want them to learn.

This is particularly important if you bring your dog to a professional trainer, or if you are training your dog for a specific event like dog sports, or competitions.

How to Introduce Your Dog To The Crate

We want to establish a very positive association for our dogs with their crate. The crate should be a place where good things happen. While the crate can be used occasionally as a timeout or punishment for inappropriate behavior, it should not only be used for this purpose.

Use Food!

When we first get our puppy or a new dog from the shelter, they may not understand the kennel, but including kennel time when they are initially getting accustomed to their new home can be necessary. Anytime your dog goes into the kennel, in the early stages of training, you should always reward them for going into the kennel, even if it isn't voluntary.

You should start using formal training sessions to build lots of positive association with going into and being in the kennel.

Crate Training Session:

1. Place your dog on a leash to prevent them from wandering off during your training session.
2. Open the kennel door and toss a few pieces of training food in the kennel (training food can be any food that your dog is happy and motivated to work for).
3. Allow your dog to walk into the kennel to eat the food and immediately give the dog their release command and encourage them to come out of the kennel.
4. Repeat this process several times.
5. Once your dog is enthusiastically going into the kennel, you can begin trying to toss a few more pieces of food into the kennel while your dog is inside the kennel to encourage them to stay in there for a few moments.
6. Gradually increase the time that your dog is in the kennel before you release them.
7. Once your dog is successfully staying in the kennel for a long enough duration (maybe 10-15 seconds) you can begin to start slightly closing the

door when the dog goes into the kennel. (Only partially close it at first, and gradually close it more as the training progresses.)

8. You can gradually keep your dog in the kennel for longer periods of time during each training session, and include sessions where you go out of sight while the dog is in the kennel for increasingly long periods of time.

NOTE: Try to keep all of the rewarding inside of the kennel. We want our dog to understand that everything good happens inside of the kennel and that nothing great happens when they come out. This will help prevent over-excitement when exiting the kennel, and will create more positive association with being inside the kennel.

Crate or Kennel Anxiety

Some dogs can develop negative associations with the kennel through unpleasant experiences. When young dogs are introduced to the kennel at an early age, and the kennel is paired with positive experiences, it can prevent anxiety inside the kennel.

When adult dogs demonstrate crate anxiety, this is often the result of repeated and long term negative experiences in the kennel. If you think of good and bad experiences as two sides of a balancing scale, basically the amount of bad experiences have just been adding up.



Dedicated crate training sessions can begin to counteract this imbalance by creating multiple deliberately positive experiences associated with the crate in a relatively short amount of time. The amount and severity of the negative experience the dog has had in the kennel can determine how difficult and lengthy the process may be.

Preventing Crate / Kennel Anxiety

Start Immediately!

Even young puppies should be acclimated to spending time in their kennels. While you cannot expect a 9-week old puppy to stay in the kennel for an entire work day without needing to go potty, they should spend short periods in the kennel with you out of sight. You can increase their kennel time as they get older.

Make Every Experience a Good One!

Every time the dog goes into the kennel, you should make it rewarding. You can use a small handful of kibble, or a tasty treat, or even a special healthy chew item like a marrow bone or a pig's ear! (Dogs should be supervised while chewing on bones or treats in case of choking.)

Keep Kennel Times Predictable

The kennel should be used on a fairly predictable schedule as part of your daily routine. Using the kennel for feeding times, or when you need to go to work helps our dogs understand and anticipate going into the kennel. By feeding your dog in the kennel, this can also really add to the positive association with the kennel.

When kennel time is predictable and on a reliable schedule, this reduces anxiety around being in the kennel. Dogs actually have fairly accurate internal clocks that help them anticipate scheduled events like feeding time, or when you are expected to return home from work.

Don't Reward Unwanted Behaviors

While we do everything we can to create a positive association with the crate, after a long period of being cooped up in the kennel, coming out of the kennel when you get home from work can be VERY rewarding.

Knowing that our dogs have been in the crate the entire time we have been at work, we may want to rush and open that door to let our dogs rush out and go outside to potty.

BUT BEWARE!

If your dog is barking, whining, spinning in the kennel, and pawing at the door to be let out, if you open that door, you are rewarding those behaviors!

Try to wait until your dog is calm before opening the door. You can even ask for a *sit* or *down* before you open the door. And always practice controlled exits from the kennel.

Downplay Arrivals and Departures

Seeing our pup after a long day of work can be the best part of our day, and its natural to want to give our dog all of the love and affection they deserve!

Controlled Exit

A controlled exit means that you dog does not rush out of the crate just because the door is open. Teach your dog to wait inside the crate until you give them their release command.

BUT....

Creating an overly exciting event when you return home from work can create excess anticipation for your arrival, which can sometimes become restlessness and anxiety inside of the kennel. The same can occur by creating a dramatic event when you leave as well.

Stay calm when you leave or arrive home, and do not pet praise or great your dog until they are also calm.

Choosing The Right Crate

Some dogs learn to love being in their crate so much, that the type of crate isn't very important. Generally, choosing the right crate becomes necessary when behavior problems inside of the crate occur.

Choosing a Crate Based on the Behavior Problem

Potty Accidents in the Crate

If your dog is having accidents inside of the kennel, we need to first rule out a few factors.

Are you providing adequate potty opportunities for your dog to relieve themselves?

Have you ruled out medical problems (UTI, Kidney infection, bladder issues)?

If you answered yes to both of these questions, now we can discuss how changing the type of crate may be helpful.

When using the crate as part of a potty training regiment, the most important aspect of the crate is the size. When the crate is too large, the dog is able to urinate or defecate in certain area of the kennel and then move to the other area of the kennel to avoid stepping, sitting, or lying in their own mess.

The crate should be just large enough for the dog to comfortably stand, turn around, and lie down, without any excess space. If the dog feels that they won't have enough room to get away from their mess, they are more likely to hold their bladder and bowels longer.

If your dog has developed a severe habit of going potty in their kennel, changing the type of kennel can give you a sort of clean slate to retrain the dog not to

potty in the kennel. The dog may be learned that the wire kennel is their toilet, so if you change to a travel or plastic kennel, it may give you the opportunity to retrain them. Keep in mind that using the appropriate size in this situation is still extremely important. (Learn more about dogs who go potty in their kennel in our blog post on “Dirty Dog Syndrome”)

Barking and Whining in the Crate

Some dogs can respond to even minor stimuli by barking and vocalizing, even when they are in their kennels. Choosing a kennel that can reduce how much your dogs can see and hear can reduce these behaviors. Wire kennels do not block any of your dog’s ability to see around them, so they can be very susceptible to stimuli.

Choose a kennel that is more enclosed with a solid top and sides. You can also add some more privacy for your dog by covering the kennel with a blanket or a towel (caution: some dogs may try to pull the blanket into the kennel and risk eating the fabric).

Escape Artists

When dogs suffer from crate anxiety, or just really want to get out of the crate, some of the less expensive kennels won’t successfully restrain them. If your dog has successfully escaped from the kennel, this will only increase the intensity of their future attempts.

The top brands of kennels that are most likely to thwart your dog’s escape attempts are:

Ruffland Kennels: Moderately priced, and crash tested kennels. These kennels are constructed of mostly rigid plastic, which is can be beneficial when dogs demonstrate intense attempts at escaping and can prevent injuries.

Dakota 283: More expensive, but better crash test ratings than the Ruffland Kennels. Rigid plastic molding with metal wire doors.

Gunnar Kennels: More expensive, but also better crash test ratings than the Ruffland brand. Rigid plastic molding with wire metal doors.

Impact Crates: Very Expensive, crash tested. Metal construction makes them extremely escape proof, however from our personal experience, intense escape attempts can result in bent and jagged metal edges inside the kennel that could

injury your dog. Additionally, intense escape attempts and chewing on the metal parts of the kennel could result in chipped or broken teeth.

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