

Guide to crate/confinement training

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Confinement training is intended to provide a comfortable and safe area or “den” for the dog, while restricting access to areas where it might house-soil, do harm to itself, or cause damage. Crate training should be considered akin to placing a young child in a playpen or crib for playtime or sleeping. Other alternatives for confinement include housing the dog in a pen, run, or dog-proofed room, where it might have more freedom to stretch out, chew, or play with its toys. If you don’t provide a safe confinement area at times that you cannot supervise, your dog may engage in stealing, chewing, or ingesting household possessions, eliminate in undesirable locations, and get into potentially dangerous situations.

The location and methods should be designed to keep the experience positive. For example, the dog should be encouraged to sleep, nap, or play with its chew toys in its confinement area. On the other hand, if the dog is confined at a time when it is in need of play, attention, or elimination, then escape attempts and anxiety are to be expected. If a dog’s attempts at escape are successful, then future, more ambitious attempts to escape are likely to occur; therefore always use a secure, inescapable form of confinement.

Benefits of a crate/confinement-trained dog

1. Security – a specific area that serves as a den or resting area for the dog
2. Safety for the pet
3. Prevents damage (chewing, investigation, elimination) to the house
4. Aids in the training of proper chewing and elimination by preventing failure and encouraging success
5. Traveling: accustoms the dog to confinement for traveling and kenneling
6. Improved bond: fewer problems, less discipline for the pet and less frustration/anxiety for owner

Crate training

1. A metal, collapsible crate with a tray floor or a plastic traveling crate works well, provided it is large enough for the dog to stand and turn around. Some dogs adapt quicker to a small room, run, or doggy playpen.
2. Because dogs are social animals, an ideal location for the crate is a room that the family frequents such as a kitchen, den, or bedroom, rather than an isolated laundry or furnace room. If you have observed your dog choosing a particular corner or room to take a nap, or you wish your dog to sleep in a particular location at night, then this might be the best location for the crate.
3. For the crate to remain a positive retreat, it should *never* be used for punishment. If social isolation (time out) is used, consider placing the dog in a laundry room or bathroom until it is calm.
4. A radio or television may help to calm the dog and may help to mask environmental noises that can trigger barking. A pheromone (Adaptil) spray in the crate or a diffuser in the room may help to calm the puppy.

Puppy crate training

1. Introduce the puppy to the crate as early as possible. Place a variety of treats, toys, or food in the crate so that the puppy is motivated to enter voluntarily. Training to respond to a cue (e.g., “Go to your kennel”) can also be useful.
2. The first confinement session should be after a period of play, exercise, and elimination (i.e., when it is time for the puppy to rest). Place the puppy in its crate with a toy and a treat and close the door. If you remain nearby and the puppy is tired it might soon settle and nap. Alternatively, if the puppy lies down to take a nap, move the puppy to the crate for the duration of the nap.
3. Leave the room but remain close enough to hear the puppy. Some degree of distress vocalization may be expected the first few times the puppy is separated from its family members. Always reward the pet when it is calm with quiet praise. Try not to let it out when it cries or whines. Release the puppy when the crying stops, when it awakes from its nap, or if it is time for you to wake the puppy for feeding, play, or elimination (e.g., prior to your departure).
4. If crying does not subside on its own, a mild interruption may be useful. Any interruption that causes fear or anxiety must be avoided since it is not psychologically healthy for the pet and could aggravate the vocalization or cause elimination in the crate. During the interruption, you should remain out of sight, so that the puppy does not learn to associate the interruption with your presence. A sharp noise, such as that provided by a shake can containing a few coins, can be used to interrupt barking. Then, after 5 seconds of quiet behavior, reward the puppy for being quiet by softly praising.

5. Repeat the cage and release procedure a few more times during the day, including each naptime and each time your puppy is given a toy or chew with which to play. Always give the puppy exercise and a chance to eliminate before securing it in the crate.
6. Prior to bedtime, the puppy should be exercised, given a final chance to eliminate for the night, and secured in its crate. Do not go to the pup if it cries but ensure that the puppy is not hurt or overly distressed. If the puppy cries in the middle of the night, it should not be ignored if it is indicating that it needs to toilet. Release the puppy when it is quiet and time to get up. Puppies under 4 months of age may not be able to keep their crate clean for the entire night, so it may be necessary to get up during the night initially as well as provide an early-morning walk for the first few weeks. Sometimes the best way to reduce distress vocalization is to locate the crate in the bedroom.
7. Never leave the puppy in its crate for longer than it can control itself or it may be forced to eliminate in the crate. If the pup must be left for longer periods, a larger confinement area with paper for elimination, a puppy litterbox, or access to an elimination area outdoors through a dog door will be necessary.
8. Until a puppy has been housetrained (no accidents for at least 4–6 consecutive weeks) and no longer destroys household objects in your absence, it should not be allowed out of its confinement area except under supervision. During supervision, desirable behaviors should be rewarded and undesirable behaviors prevented or redirected.

The adult dog

1. The two most important principles for effective crate training include locating the crate (or confinement area) in a location where the dog feels comfortable about sleeping or napping and gradually introducing the dog to confinement in a positive manner.
2. Set up the crate in the dog's feeding area or sleeping area with the door open for a few days. Place the dog's food, treats, and toys in the crate so that it enters the crate on its own.
3. Once the dog is regularly entering the crate voluntarily, begin closing the door for very short periods of time and follow the same principles as puppy training above.
4. At this point, the dog could be left in its crate during bedtime or during short departures.
5. Some dogs may adapt quicker to crate training by having the dog sleep in the crate at night.
6. If you are leaving your pet in a crate be certain to determine how often it needs to eliminate and how long it can be confined without social contact or exercise. While some dogs may manage for a full work day, it is likely in most dogs' best interest to arrange for a midday dog walker if you are going to be gone for more than 4–6 hours.

Crate-training problems

If your dog is particularly anxious or eliminates in its crate, then it may be an indication that some part of the crate-training technique needs to be revisited.

1. It may be possible that the dog is being left in its crate longer than it can control elimination. Confine the dog for a shorter time and be certain that it has eliminated prior to confinement.
2. If the crate is overly large some dogs may sleep in one end and eliminate in the other. Consider a smaller crate or a divider.
3. If your dog is anxious or attempts to escape when left in its crate, then it may not have been accustomed to its crate in a gradual and positive enough manner. Review the steps above so that the crate is in a comfortable bedding location, that each introduction is positive, and that the crate is not used for punishment.
4. If the dog has previously escaped from its crate, this may encourage further escape attempts. Change to a more secure confinement area or ensure that the crate is inescapable. It may then be necessary to supervise the dog in its crate for a period of time to help reduce anxiety and deter further escape attempts.
5. Some dogs are particularly resistant to crating. These dogs may adapt better to other types of confinement such as a pen, dog run, small room, or barricaded area (e.g., using a child gate).
6. Rule out separation anxiety as a cause of crate anxiety.