

Why do dogs need to be confined?

Dogs are highly social animals that make wonderful pets. They 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, your dog may still feel the need to chew, play, explore, eat, or eliminate. Crate training is neither cruel nor unfair if done correctly. On the contrary, leaving the dog unsupervised to wander, investigate, destroy, and perhaps injure itself is far more inhumane than confinement. Ensure the crate is large enough, your dog gets food, play and attention before and after it is confined, and you return before the dog needs to eliminate.

Benefits

The two most important benefits are the safety it affords your dog, and the damage that is prevented. The crate also provides a place of security - a comfortable retreat where your dog can relax, sleep, or chew on a favorite toy. By confining your dog to a crate or room, when you are not available to supervise, behaviour problems can be prevented. When you are at home, supervision and rewards can be used to prevent undesirable behaviour, and you can teach your dog where to eliminate and what areas are "out of bounds."

Type and Size of Crate

Use a wire or fiberglass crate with adequate ventilation. Some dogs, especially adult dogs, prefer the wire crates because they can see what's going on around them and air flow is optimal. However, some prefer the enclosed fiberglass ones because they give a more secure feeling. Some dogs feel more secure if a blanket is draped over the crate. If you do drape something over the crate ensure there is adequate air circulation and tuck all loose ends under the crate so that the cover does not end up inside the crate, chewed and possibly consumed. The crate should be large enough for your dog to lie down, stand up and turn around in when he's full grown.

For a puppy, use a crate the size he'll need as an adult but block part of it off until he is housetrained. The crate needs to be clean and if he has room enough to eliminate and sleep in the crate that may become a hard habit to break. Only block part of the crate, if your puppy is going to be left alone for a reasonable period of time. As soon as your puppy is released from his crate, take him outside to the designated area and reward elimination. Since the crate prevents chewing, digging, and elimination in your home and on your property, owners of crate trained puppies have fewer behaviour concerns, the puppy receives far less discipline and punishment, and the overall relationship between you and your puppy can be dramatically improved.

How to Get Started

It takes time and effort to properly crate train your dog. Eventually he will think of it as his safe place and be happy to spend time in there when needed. Because dogs are social animals, an ideal location for the crate is a room where the family spends time such as a kitchen or den during the day and a bedroom at night, rather than an isolated laundry or furnace room. Ideally, you should try to spend the first few days at home with your new dog. This will enable you to introduce the crate gradually. The key to making the crate your 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). Start by placing a variety of treats in the crate throughout the day so your dog is encouraged to enter

voluntarily. Food, water, toys and bedding could also be offered to your puppy/dog in the open crate. Train your dog to accept the crate by always praising him when he enters it. Use the crate for only a few minutes the first few times and be sure to leave the door open. To enforce positive feelings about the crate, feed your dog while he's in the crate. Within a few days, you'll be able to close the crate door and stay in the room going about your business. Give your dog a safe toy such as a Nylabone or stuffed Kong to keep him busy.

The next step is to be able to do the following: Feed, water and walk your dog. Then crate him with the door shut for an hour. Do this for several days. Then use the crate when you need it. Follow this procedure for a puppy or an adult dog.

Night Time

You will want your dog to sleep in your bedroom at night if at all possible – not on your bed, but somewhere in the room on a blanket, mat or in a crate. Shut the bedroom door to prevent access to the rest of the house.

Time at night in the bedroom with you is a time for extended contact without demands. While uneventful, this time together builds trust and confidence between you and your dog. Adult dogs (one year or older) should be able to make it through the night without a housetraining accident once he knows he should go to the bathroom outside. Puppies under the age of 16 weeks probably won't be able to make it. Dogs between the ages of 16 weeks and a year old will have varying degrees of success. No matter how old your dog is, if he whines or stirs in the night, take him outside no matter what time it is. This will reinforce the notion of "asking" to be let out and speed up the housetraining process.

Puppies: A crate can be used at night in the bedroom. The first night away from littermates can be very stressful. For the first night put the crate on your bed, for the second night put the crate on a chair close to your bed and on the third night have the crate on the floor in your bedroom. Be sure to take him outside if he whines or stirs.

Adult Dogs: Don't use a crate at night until the dog is used to it (see above for instructions). Instead, encourage your dog to sleep on your bedroom floor on a favourite mat or blanket. Again, shut the door to your bedroom so that your dog doesn't have access to the whole house. If he has to go out in the night, you'll be able to hear him whine or stir and you can take him out.

Some Rules

- Do not leave your dog in his crate day and night.
- Put your dog in his crate only after he's relieved himself and been exercised. It's your responsibility to ensure your dog has the opportunity to relieve himself when he needs to.
- Take your dog outside often at first. Puppies should go out at least every three hours. Adult dogs, if not housetrained, should go out every five to seven hours.
- When you first take your dog out of his crate, carry or lead him on leash to his "toilet area" outside. Praise him for doing his business outside.
- Don't let him out when he is barking, you do not want him to associate that barking will get him out of his crate.
- Gradually give your dog more freedom outside the crate but only when he's ready for it. If he goofs, start over again. When he's out of his crate, always leave the door open so he can go there to rest.
- If he wets only at night, crate him only at night. If being left alone unsupervised is a problem, then this is the time to use the crate.
- The crate must be very clean. Otherwise, you will teach your dog to be dirty. If he soils the crate, clean it thoroughly and clean the dog if necessary.

- To prevent damage to your house by an anxious unattended dog, crate him when you go out and when you cannot monitor him.
- Use the crate for “time outs” if your dog gets too exuberant or you begin to lose patience. But ensure that you make the crate a positive experience every time. Be neutral when you put your dog in the crate for a time out.
- Crates are useful when traveling. It’s your dog’s home away from home in your car and at your destination.
- Never leave the puppy in a crate for longer than he can control himself or he may be forced to eliminate in the crate.
- If the pup must be left for long periods during which he might eliminate, he 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, his control increases and he can be left longer in a crate.
- During the daytime, once the puppy has relieved himself, 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.
- A crate is not an excuse to ignore your dog!

Remember....

Using a crate to train your dog can be worthwhile. Misuse is cruel. Please follow instructions very carefully. Do not keep your dog in his crate more than is absolutely necessary. Once he is housetrained and can be trusted in your home without being destructive, either stop using the crate or simply leave the crate door open for your dog to come and go. It is advisable not to give your new dog free run of the house.

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 he can control (hold in) his elimination, it will be necessary to provide an area much larger than a crate, so that your dog has a location on which to eliminate, away from food and bedding.

Continued anxiety, destruction or vocalization when placed in the crate may indicate separation anxiety or other behavioural issues and you should contact a professional dog trainer.