

Playing crate games is a fun and enjoyable way to create a positive association for your dog and his crate. Other benefits of crate games include: self control, reduced door bolting, providing him a safe place to relax and respect for a barrier.

Stage 1 – Getting Started

- Only open the crate door when your dog is calm
- If the crate door opens on the right hand side, open the door with your left hand and take a treat in your right hand and lure and reward your dog for a “sit” in the back of the kennel
- Close and latch the door
- Repeat multiple times
- Ensure that you remove your hand from the crate completely between repetitions, your hand on the crate will eventually be the cue to “sit”
- Use very, very tasty treats

Stage 2 – A Game about Choice

- The challenge for your dog is increased and they are given the opportunity to choose to “sit” at the back of the crate to be reinforced
- You want your dog to have success, so make sure that you do not allow them to escape out of the crate
- Your dog has to choose to “sit” at the back of the crate as you: move to the side, move back, pick up the leash and even clip the leash onto the collar
- Reward your dog for sitting at the back of the crate, vary where they get the treat from (back and high in the crate, through the side or back of the crate)
- Do not reward any forward motion, you need to shut the crate door if they is even the slightest movement forward, then try again. Do not have several failures, if your dog is not succeeding then make it less challenging or even return to Stage One.

Stage 3 – In and Out

- Minimize distractions and do not play back to back games at this stage. This stage is to increase the reinforcement of entering the crate.
- You need to start out with the leash attached to your dog. Have the end of the leash under your foot.
- Turn your body away from crate and allow your dog to come out of the crate using a release cue such as “All Done” or “Release”
- Ignore your dog (no eye contact, touching or talking) and turn your back to the crate
- Continue ignoring your dog until he fully enters the crate and then jackpot (give him several really tasty treats as you praise him lavishly)
- If your dog does not enter the crate in two minutes then reduce the wandering ability with providing less leash or even use containment

Stage 4 - Increase Distractions and Cueing Enter to Crate

- Use a bungee to hold the crate door open
- Use the steps in stage 3 but use a verbal cue when releasing the collar (e.g. "Get in the Crate", "Kennel"). The verbal cue can now be added because your dog is now entering the crate enthusiastically

Collar Grab Game

- Open the crate door when your dog sits in the back of the crate as you put your hand on the crate door
- Release your dog from the crate, grab his collar and reinforce with a lower value treat
- Pull back on the collar and release, do not cue entry to the crate
- When your dog enters the crate reward with a high value treat
- Close the door and start over
- Have low level distractions and do not increase distance too quickly. Work around the crate in an arc
- Do not move forward from this stage until your dog is showing drive to get in and out of the crate

Change Your Mind Game

- Equivalent to Simon Says
- Verbally release your dog from the crate and play tug
- Put your dog back into the crate and use your body or a toy to psych out your dog and then do not verbally release, if they leave the crate, take them by the collar and put them back in the crate and close the door, your dog should only leave the crate when you verbally release them

Add Distance

- To increase distance away from the crate, you want to vary the distance in a ping pong fashion (e.g. 1 m, 2 m, 0.5 m, 3 m, 2 m etc.)
- Ideally the dog is focusing on the crate and not on you and is eager to go into the crate
- If at any point your dog stops and looks at you, go get them and restart them at the beginning
- If you are not successful 3 times in a row then you need to decrease the criteria (closer to the crate)

Motivated Recall ("Come")

- Leave your dog in the crate with the door open
- Say "Name" and "Release"
- Run away, dog can chase you and then play tug
- You can use agility equipment to build speed

Big Distractions

- Have your dog in the crate with the door open
- Start by dropping a cookie (or treat), throw a cookie then work up to dropping several cookies
- Use toys with the same process as the cookies

- Reward your dog in the crate some of the time or you can release them to go and eat the treats or play with the distractions

Advanced Crate Games

- Have your dog in the crate with the door open and play tug with another dog. Periodically stop and feed the dog in the crate
- Use another crate and have your dog race between crates and reward in both crates
- Play with a toy, go over a piece of agility equipment and send them to a crate
- Start in crate with the door open, release to agility equipment and then to another crate or back to the original crate
- Transfer from one area to another using crate and ex-pen, mat, doorway. This can be eventually done with multiple dogs. Use their name and then release to crate or other area

Problem Solving

- For vocal dogs you can try and cover the crate with a blanket
 - If it is warm outside or your dog wants to pull the blanket into the crate you can place a board on top of the crate and then drape the blanket out of reach your dog's reach
 - Ideally if your dog is being vocal someone other than the owner covers the crate
 - When quiet the owner can uncover the front door
 - When quiet with the front door uncovered you can reward him intermittently
 - Slowly remove the blanket from the other sides and the top when your dog is quiet
- For a dog who resource guards crates
 - Cover the crate with a blanket but leave the front open to the environment
 - Feed at the back of the crate when people/children/dogs visibly pass at a distance that the dog can handle
 - Slowly decrease the distance from to the crate, but ensure that your dog can still be successful
- For dogs that have had negative crate experiences or are afraid of the crate
 - Shape positive associations with parts of the crate
 - For a wire crate, pull out the pan to reinforce by itself (initially for sniffing it, then touching it, then 1 paw, 2 paws, etc, until he is easily and comfortably stepping on the crate pan)
 - Slowly add the pan to the crate (just put in the lip of the crate, then slowly insert it further)
 - Hard airline crates, take it apart and start with only the bottom of the crate, then add the top creating positive associations and then add the door