

Crate Training Basics *(adapted from PetMD)*

When making the first introduction, it is best done in steps. The last thing you want to do is frighten your puppy to the point that he is reluctant or unwilling to get into his crate. Ideally, you want your puppy to get into the crate at your command. But why?

Benefits of Crate Training

There are a lot of good reasons for crate training. For one, it is an essential part of housebreaking. Puppies will not usually soil their bed. Therefore, if the crate is set up as a resting space, the puppy will wait until he leaves the crate to do his business. This will put you in control of where and when your puppy relieves himself.

→To set up the crate as a resting space, it should be **NO LARGER** than the space your puppy needs to stand up, turn around, and lie down.

You will find that the crate is also useful for sequestering the dog when you have company over, car travel, and for making sure that the puppy is safe at night -- i.e. not eating things left within reach, tearing at furniture, or soiling on the floors. Think of the crate as a little cave in which your puppy can feel safe and secure, and he will respond positively to it.

Making Crate Training a Pleasant Experience

To make crate training a positive experience for the puppy, make sure that he feels at ease throughout the entire process. You can do this by placing an old shirt or blanket on the bottom of the crate so that he is comfortable (if he starts to chew it, be sure to remove it).

A puppy must never be locked up and left alone if it is his first time inside the crate. This can be a very traumatic experience for your puppy and will only make it more difficult for you the next time you try to get him to go inside the crate and behave.

Instead, tempt the puppy to enter the crate by placing some kibble inside. Be generous with your praises as he enters the crate to eat the kibble. If he does not make a move to enter the crate, pick him up and slowly put him inside with the door left open. Reassure your puppy by petting him if he seems agitated and frightened. Once the puppy is inside the crate for a few moments, call him to come out of the crate to join you. Praise him with simple words and pats when he comes to you.

After practicing going in and out of the crate willingly several times, once the puppy appears to be at ease inside the crate and does not show any signs of fright, then you can close the door slowly. Keep it closed for one minute, as long as he remains calm all throughout. After that, open the door and invite him out while generously praising him.

What if He Whines?

Once you have passed the initial hurdle of familiarizing your puppy with the crate, you will want to get him comfortable with going into the crate and staying there quietly. Similar to before, the best trick for getting a puppy to go inside a crate willingly is to tempt him with food. Fill a bowl with a small amount of puppy food while you let him watch. Let him sniff the food and then slowly place the bowl of food inside the crate.

Once the puppy is inside, slowly close the door (so as not to startle the puppy) and allow him to eat. He will likely finish his food inside and only begin to whine or bark after he is done with his meal. When he starts to bark and whine, tap the door of the crate and say “No” in a strong, commanding (but not loud) voice. With repetition, this will make him stop crying and eventually train him not to whine when he is placed inside his crate.

You will gradually increase the time the puppy stays inside the crate. If he whines, wait for him to quiet down -- or five minutes, whichever is first -- before you open the door to let him out. Praise him when he comes out, and take him outside to relieve himself immediately. Repeat this a few times a day.

After some time, your puppy will begin to feel at ease inside his crate and may even go to his crate on his own. This is the time to lengthen his stay inside, although you must keep in mind that there is also a limit to the maximum number of hours that your puppy can spend inside his crate before becoming uncomfortable.

Throughout your puppy’s life, intermittently reward for going into the crate so that he continues to see it as a safe, happy place.

Remember: no soft or string toys inside the crate. You don’t want your puppy to get choked while you are away! It is also a good idea to remove collars when the puppy is inside a wire crate, as they can get caught and cause strangulation. I recommend only using toys such as Kongs or Nylabones in the crate.