



Crate Training Your Dog



The crate or kennel is a valuable management tool to help train dogs and adult dogs. It can be used to prevent dogs from having opportunities to house soil, be destructive, or annoy family members at inappropriate times. They can also provide your dog with a safe place where he can go to be away from others, like small children that may annoy him. However, crates are too often used as substitutes for, instead of as adjuncts to, proper training. Crating may prevent a behavior from occurring, but does not train the dog not to do it when given the opportunity. If crating time is excessive, your dog may not have sufficient time for exercise and social interaction with family members. Without this time, other problems may be created such as fearfulness of people and new things.

For a crate to be useful to you, you must train your dog to use it. The dog must think about the crate as a pleasant place, and be comfortable when left there. This cannot be done by just putting the dog in the crate and “letting him get used to it”. You must acclimate your dog to the crate in a gradual way that is pleasant for him.

Acclimating a Dog to a Crate

When selecting a crate for your dog, get one that allows the dog to stand up, turn around and lie down comfortably but not much more. If you have a larger crate, consider placing dividers in it to make it smaller. If the dog has too much room, it may not effectively inhibit elimination behavior. It is very important that the dog’s initial experiences with a crate be pleasant. Allow the dog to explore the crate. Toss toys and tidbits inside to encourage the dog to enter. Feed the dog in the crate at least some of the time. When your dog will enter, and exit the crate willingly, without reluctance, close the door for a few seconds or a minute and remain sitting close to the crate. Do not try to push this first confinement period to see how long he will tolerate it. Let the dog out and ignore him. Release from confinement should not result in a “big deal”, as this will make it more likely the dog will view being in the crate as less pleasant compared to being out of it. Take a break for a few minutes, and repeat the exercise again. Slowly increase the time your dog is in the crate with the door shut. If at any time the dog becomes agitated or fearful - whining, whimpering, yelping, barking or trying to escape – wait until he has momentarily stopped showing his distressed behavior then let him out. The next confinement should be shorter than the one that distressed him. Don’t force the dog to be in the crate when he is distressed. You may want to work up to practicing when the family is eating dinner. Crating the dog during your dinner time prevents pestering and prevents the dog from getting into things because nobody is supervising him. Getting to this point may take several days. Sometimes placing the dog’s favorite blanket in the crate will make it more pleasant to him. If he doesn’t have a favorite blanket, placing an old shirt or dirty towel that has your scent on it into the crate may make it more familiar. Alternatively, the item could be draped over the crate rather than put inside it. Recognize that the dog may destroy the item, so don’t place anything in or near the crate that you aren’t prepared to lose. In the meantime, the dog can begin sleeping in the crate at night. It is crucial that the crate be located near or preferably in the bedroom so someone can hear him when he cries to be let outside. Dogs should be crated close to the family in order to prevent crating from being perceived as social isolation. Some adult dogs who have no previous



experience with a crate may become agitated and fearful if crated for too long. Being able to observe the dog while he is crated overnight will prevent the dog from being trapped in the crate and becoming increasingly upset.

Once your dog is comfortably sleeping in the crate at night, she can be left alone during the day for short time periods while crated. The first few absences should be less than 30 minutes. It's not a bad idea to leave a tape recorder on at first so you will know if your dog is howling or barking. This behavior is a sign of fear or anxiety, and means that your dog is not calm in the crate. Perhaps you tried to do too much too soon, or maybe the dog had a previous bad experience in the crate. Try crating for shorter time periods. If things go well, gradually increase the duration you are gone, but intersperse brief absences with longer ones. Continue to crate your dog for a few minutes each day when you are home, so that crating does not always predict that you are leaving. You can leave your dog with a chew or interactive toy, or Kong when she is crated while alone.

How Long a Dog Should be Crated?

Dogs should never be left crated for longer than they can control their bladder or bowels. For young dogs, this may mean no more than a few hours at a time. Geriatric dogs also need to eliminate more frequently than they did as young adults. Many, but not all, young mature dogs may be able to be crated for an entire workday without a break. It is preferable however to give them a break if at all possible. Young dogs especially need a lot of time for play, exercise and time with you. After being crated all day, they are ready to rock and roll when you arrive home from work, tired and wanting to relax. This is part of owning a dog!! If you aren't willing to spend time playing with your dog or taking her for a walk, then you might want to reconsider whether a dog fits with your lifestyle. Don't allow yourself to get into the following trap. Your dog, after being crated all day, is rambunctious and unruly when you arrive home. You find this annoying, and put her back in the crate. You try releasing her a little later, and she is even worse than before because she is even more in need of exercise and play time.

Retraining Adult Dogs

Retraining an adult dog is similar to training a young dog. All of the same rules apply. You must be consistent with the dog, reward good behavior, make accidents difficult, never punish after the fact, clean soiled areas and gradually reduce supervision. The major differences are that adult dogs can usually hold their waste longer than younger dogs, they usually learn quicker than younger dogs and they may already have preferences that may need to be overcome and changed. Dogs from shelters, from other homes or even those that move with their families to a new home may take a few days or weeks to learn where they are supposed to eliminate even if they were housetrained previously. Never assume that any dog in a new environment is housetrained. By following the rules for housetraining from the beginning, you can avoid future problems.

When is a Crate Not Appropriate?

Dogs who display signs of separation anxiety almost always become worse the more they are confined.

Manifestations of separation anxiety are:

> House soiling, destructiveness or vocalizing within the first 30 minutes after your departure



> Undesirable behaviors that occur consistently when the dog is alone and occur only when the dog is alone. Thus, the dog who steals food from the counter, gets in the trash, or tears up a book every now and then is probably not a separation anxiety problem

> Destructive behavior that is often directed at window coverings, door and window moldings, floor coverings in front of doors, or items with the owner's scent such as personal belongings, the TV remote or the couch cushions

> Following the owner from room to room, not wanting to be left in a room alone

> Frantic greetings upon the owner's return.

If your dog doesn't seem to have a problem with separation anxiety, but does not tolerate crating, it may be due to other types of fears or anxieties. Dogs who have noise phobias, such as fear of thunder, often become very frantic if home alone in a crate when a storm occurs.

Signs that your dog has not been calm while crate include:



> Damage to the crate from escape attempts

> Damage to surrounding objects, that the pup has been able to reach through the bars of a wire crate

> Wet chest fur from drooling or salivating or pools of saliva on the crate floor

> Urination or defecation in the crate ☒ The dog moving the crate from one location to another

> Excessive barking or howling recorded on audiotape

If you think your dog may have separation anxiety problems, or other fear related problems, you should seek the help of a professional in the field of animal behavior.