

CRATE TRAINING

ONE APPROACH TO HOUSEBREAKING AND THE PREVENTION OF DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIORS



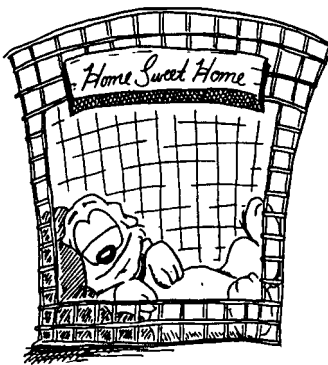
YOU WANT ME TO DO WHAT?! PUT MY DOG IN A CAGE?! HOW CRUEL!!

Cruel? NO. Done properly, crate training can be the answer to many problems faced by dogs and their owners.

Dogs have a natural denning instinct that they inherited from their ancestors, the wolf. Wolves find a small cave, or dig themselves one and this is where they sleep, rest and just “hang out.” It is home. Providing your dog with a crate satisfies his desire to den. No one is going to yell at him for doing something wrong while he is in his crate. No one is going to step on his tail, trip over him or pull on his ears. It is easier to teach small children to stay away from the dog while he is in his crate than it is to yell “LEAVE THE DOG ALONE” every couple of minutes.

FIRST, WHAT IS A CRATE?

The answer is simply that a crate is an indoor dog house, with a door. It is just big enough for your dog to stand up, turn around and lie down in. This “indoor dog house” is placed in a much used area of your house such as the living room or kitchen. It can be made of plastic, wire, wood or a combination of all three. It is a place for your dog to relax in when no one is around to make sure Rover is staying out of trouble. It is your dog’s space in your house. It is his bed (or room) and sanctuary; it is his.



WHY CRATE TRAIN?

Many people crate train their dog for the simple reason that the dog can do no wrong while he is in his crate.

Your dog can’t piddle on the rug, harass the mailman, chew on the furniture, get into the trash or eat your children’s hamster.

He learns to relax and go to sleep while you are away. This in effect is teaching him good habits...SLEEP while his family is away.

And while he sleeps, you can go shopping, visit friends, run errands or take in a movie and not have to worry about what kind of shape the house is going to be in when you get home. You put your dog in his crate, shut the door and leave for a few hours, knowing that when you return it will be a happy reunion and not a one-sided yelling match, with your dog cringing in the corner.

BUT WHAT ABOUT EXERCISE? I THOUGHT A DOG NEEDED FREEDOM TO RUN AROUND. WON'T MY DOG BE CRAMPED IN SUCH SMALL QUARTERS?!

NO. Before putting your dog in his crate each day before you go to work or go off for a couple of hours to run errands, you will have made sure he has had at least a good romp with you. Remember, you won’t be putting your dog there forever. Four or five hours while you go shopping, or overnight so you can sleep without having to worry about what your dog is doing is fine.

He will not have to spend every day of life in his crate anyway. Just until he outgrows that puppy destructive stage, or until you teach him your household rules or until he adjusts to living with you (especially in the case if you have adopted a shelter dog). Your dog will actually enjoy being in crate after you have taught him that it is his “room.”

For longer periods of time (generally anything over nine hours during the day), your dog should be confined to a larger area such as a completely enclosed dog run along side your house. Ideally if you need to crate your dog during your work day (5+ hours) then either come home at lunch to let your dog out for a stretch and elimination OR provide a secure area large enough for your dog to eliminate in and yet sleep or play in the other (i.e. a closed off kitchen area, outside enclosed dog run or a very secure backyard area). Again, always make sure your puppy or dog has had a good exercise session with you anytime before confining them for the day.

THEN WHY CRATE TRAIN AT ALL? WHY CAN'T I JUST LEAVE MY DOG IN THE YARD ALL THE TIME?

Because dogs by nature are pack animals, they are very social. They prefer the company of others probably more so than humans do. They need to be in the house, even when you are not there or when you are sleeping and can’t be interacting with them. They need to feel that they are part of your family “pack” and that means being in the house (the pack’s den), even though you may not be in the house. Depriving your dog of that feeling of “belonging” and of being a part of your family pack can do as much psychological damage as locking a child in the closet for most of the day. They become neurotic or psychotic.

Problem behaviors such as digging, barking, chewing and escaping may develop in a backyard dog.

If all you want is a backyard fixture, then get yourself a statue. But, if what you want is a family companion and friend, then get yourself a dog and let him in the house with you, let him belong.

BUT WON'T HE GET TERRIBLY BORED, BEING LOCKED UP?!!

NO. He will learn to just sleep while you are away. That's a lot better than leaving him out where he learns it is fun to chew on the door, get into the garbage or piddle on the rug.

A dog will sleep eighteen hours a day if you let him. And remember a dog's version of recreation while you are away often involves destroying your house or your yard.

Also, it is not as if he must remain in his crate for the rest of his life; just until they get over the destructive period all dogs go through when they are young. Or if it's an older dog in a new home, just until you, as the owner, feel safe leaving him alone in your house unconfined.

Many dogs form habits, such as house soiling, that can easily be broken by crate training. If a dog has formed the habit of urinating or defecating in the house wherever and whenever he feels like it, then crate training can teach your dog to hold it until you provide him the opportunity to go out and to relieve himself. A normal, healthy dog will try very hard not to urinate or defecate in his crate. To do so would mean he would have to lay in it. Most dogs prefer to wait until you can return to let them out.

PERHAPS I'LL GIVE IT A TRY. WHERE CAN I GET A CRATE?

The Humane Society's own pet store, Pet Pourri carries them or any of the larger pet stores such as PetsMart, Premium Pet, AnJans, Cindy's or Petco.

You can also try the classifieds in the newspaper but they are far and few between there.

WHAT KIND OF MONEY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

It depends on the size of your dog and where you purchase the crate. Just remember though, a crate is something your dog will have the rest of his life. It is his bed, his room, his space in your house. A good crate will last much longer than your dog will, so don't worry about it wearing out! Also compare the initial cost of a crate with the cost of destructive behavior. It is much easier to spend money on a crate than replacing your sofa or your landscaping in your yard.

Shelling out sixty dollars for a new crate is nothing compared to buying new carpet or a sofa, replacing stereo equipment, re-landscaping your yard, trying to find Rover after he has escaped from your yard or explaining hamster heaven to your kids!

WHAT SIZE SHOULD I GET?

Your dog's crate should be just big enough for him to stand up, turn around and lie down in, NO BIGGER. The reason for this is so that he can not piddle in one corner and sleep in

the opposite corner. This teaches your dog control.

WHAT ABOUT PUPPIES — I DON'T WANT TO KEEP BUYING CRATES AS MY PUPPY GROWS BIGGER!

Right. You should guesstimate what size your puppy will be as an adult (breed books will be able to help you with this, providing you know what breed or mixture of breeds your puppy is) and buy a crate that will be big enough for him as an adult dog. Then you put cardboard boxes or a wire divider in one end to make the crate smaller. As your puppy grows, you gradually increase his "living space" in the crate by getting smaller boxes or moving the wire divider.

If you have an adult dog already, take him with you to the pet store to size him for the crate. The top of the crate should extend two inches above his shoulders. The end of the crate should be about two inches from your dog's rump. Perfect fit.

WHAT'S THE BEST KIND OF CRATE TO BUY?

Plastic is probably the best, although metal crates have the advantage of folding up for storage. Remember though, that a dog will want his crate door left open so he can go in and out as he pleases after he has outgrown the initial purpose of the crate. So, the fact that metal crates can fold up when they are not in use may not be a good reason to purchase that kind of crate. Plastic is easier to clean and does not squeak and rattle like metal does when the dogs moves around inside.

You can make your own crate out of wood, but wood is difficult to keep clean and some dogs like to chew on wood anyway!

Some brand names of plastic crates are: Vari-Kennel, Kennel Cab and Sky Kennel.

ONCE I HAVE THE CRATE, WHERE DO I PUT IT?

Your dog's crate should be placed in the most often used room in the house, and it should stay there. The living room, the family room, the kitchen, wherever your family spends the most time.

OK, SO NOW I HAVE A CRATE. HOW DO I TEACH MY DOG THAT THIS IS HIS ROOM?

At first most dogs resent being confined because they feel you have left them and are not coming back. However, given some time to adjust, your dog will soon learn to love his crate and the security and privacy that goes along with it. Try feeding your dog his meals with the door tied open the first week or two.

CRATE TRAINING THE EIGHT TO TWELVE WEEK OLD PUPPY

Young puppies have very small bladders and can not control them very well. They have to eliminate much more often than older puppies or adult dogs. To have a successful crate training program, follow the guidelines below.

Place a cardboard box or some other material in the crate to allow the puppy only enough room to lie down and turn

around. A blanket or old towel can be placed in the remainder of the crate as the puppy's bed. Leave the crate door open so your puppy has access to his bed (crate) and a small area right outside the crate door allowing for a "bathroom spot" outside of his crate. You may line his "bathroom area" with newspapers for easy clean up. The papers are there for easy clean up but not to deliberately teach the puppy to go on them. Paper training your puppy is not recommended. See the house training handout for more information on the correct way to house train your puppy.

Make sure the barricade is sturdy enough to prevent the puppy from climbing out and relieving himself in an inappropriate spot. This "bathroom spot" should not be a large area, usually two feet square is plenty of room.

As the puppy approaches three months of age he can be expected to "hold it" longer. A four month old puppy can usually spend an entire night without having to relieve himself, as long as he did his business right before going to bed and he has not had any water at least two hours before bedtime. At three months you can begin shutting the door of his crate and leaving him for four or five hours at a time, BUT make sure your puppy has relieved himself first, had a good exercise session, and has a pleasing chew toy in his crate when you leave.

Most puppies that have had access to their crates from beginning have no complaints. The first time they are shut in, they may cry a little, but ignore them and soon they will give up and go to sleep.

DO NOT LET YOUR PUPPY OUT WHEN HE IS CRYING RIGHT AFTER YOU HAVE SHUT THE DOOR (the exception to this is if you have forgotten to take him out to do his business first before locking him in). If you let your puppy out while he is crying, you will have taught him that crying gets his way (emotional blackmail!). Always wait until your puppy is quiet before you let him out of his crate.

The only other exception to this is when you first get up in the morning and your puppy is probably "loaded" and needs to go out immediately. Take him out right away. Also if you have been gone during the day for any length of time, you want to take your young puppy out and immediately upon your arrival home. As your puppy physically matures and gains bladder and bowel control, you can expect him to "hold it" longer. A rough gauge of how long your puppy can hold it during the day is how ever many months your puppy is in age, is equal to how many hours he can hold it safely in the daytime. So if your puppy is four months old, he can probably hold it safely for four hours at a stretch during the daytime and so on.

Your puppy's crate should only contain an old towel, a special chew item such as a stuffed Kong toy or stuffed sterilized beef bone. Do not leave food or water in the crate with your puppy.

You can teach your puppy to enter his crate upon command.

Read the section on crate training the adult dog to find out how.

CRATE TRAINING THE FIVE MONTH OLD PUPPY AND ADULT DOGS

Although crate training the older puppy or adult dog is not as easy as a young puppy, it can still be done with less hassle than would be expected. Most dogs resent being confined at first, but soon learn to love and enjoy the security their crate provides.

Patience, persistence, some small yummy treats your dog enjoys, a squirt bottle and a good set of ear plugs are the only requirements to begin crate training. The first step is to let your dog investigate the crate with the door securely tied open. Throw his favorite toy or one of his treats just inside the lip of the crate and watch what happens. As soon as your dog goes in after the treat or toy, praise enthusiastically with a happy tone of voice (do not try to shut the door at this point). Keep tossing the treats or toy into the crate so your dog has to go further in each time. Remember to praise as your dog goes IN the crate. Ignore him once he steps out of the crate. Keep this up until your dog quickly and easily goes into the crate whenever you toss his toy or treat into the very back of the crate. Next try putting his food dish in the crate so if he wants to eat he has to go in. **DO NOT TRY TO CLOSE THE DOOR JUST YET.** At this point you are still trying to build confidence in your dog that this indoor dog house is his and will not "eat" him. This procedure may take a few minutes to a week or more.

The next step is to repeat the above but each time your dog goes in his crate, say a command such as "GO TO BED," "KENNEL," "CRATE," "ZONE OUT," "CHILL OUT," etc. in a happy tone of voice. It does not matter what words you say, the important point is you say the SAME words each time you play the crate game with him. For him to learn a command such as "KENNEL" may take up to fifty repetitions or more, so you may want to split this into several training sessions.

The next step is to actually shut him in the crate. Do not shut your dog in the crate until he is easily going in and out of the crate without any hesitation or fear. Give his command such as "ZONE OUT," and as soon as he goes in, give him a special chew toy (like a stuffed Kong, Tuffy or a rawhide bone) or feed him his meal and quietly shut the door. Be ready for the verbal onslaught! Stay in the same room for a few minutes and then when your dog is quiet, open the crate door and let him out.

If your dog is being very vocal, quickly rap on the top of the crate while you give the command "QUIET." Wait until he is quiet for a minute or two, THEN let him out while he is still quiet. If rapping is not working, try a squirt bottle set on straight stream. Aim it right at his nose and squirt him several times as you give the command "QUIET." Again wait for several minutes of silence BEFORE YOU LET HIM OUT. This is where the persistence and perseverance part comes in.

The more consistent, firm and unyielding to his complaints you are, the faster your dog will crate train. If at any time he refuses to enter his crate, just gently push him in and once he is in there, give him treat and shut the door. If you have a large dog, put his leash on, thread the leash through the back or far side of his crate and gently guide his front end in as you push the rear in. **YOU MUST LET HIM KNOW THAT HE HAS NO OTHER CHOICE.** Don't yell or threaten him, just quietly put him in his crate. Once he is there, praise him enthusiastically, shut the door and then give him his treat through the door.

Practice the above five or six times a day, each time increasing the time your dog has to spend in his crate by five minutes each time you try it. Try moving into a different room when he is in his crate. Be ready to stop the verbal insults when you do this. By the time you reach up to twenty minutes, your dog can safely be let in his crate for several hours at a stretch. Leave him for an hour or two inside his crate while you watch TV or clean house. Let him feel secure that he will not be left in there forever, that he will be let out eventually and that you are not going to go away and forget about him forever. Just make sure he has been exercised, has eliminated first and gets his special chewy toy when he goes in his crate for longer periods.

IT SOUNDS LIKE A CRATE IS A PRETTY HANDY THING TO HAVE AROUND. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE OTHER ADVANTAGES TO HAVING A CRATE TRAINED DOG ...BESIDES THE HOUSEBREAKING PART?

Well, a dog that feels secure in his crate is much easier to take on long trips than a dog that is left to jump excitedly around the inside of the car. Your dog does not get hit by falling camping gear, and is much safer should an accident occur.

Hotels or motels are much more willing to allow dogs to stay if you bring your dog's crate, plus the maid isn't likely to accidentally let your dog loose into the streets of a strange city should your dog be crated while you are out.

Dogs being shipped by plane or train feel much more secure and can handle the stress of traveling much easier if they have their own crate to travel in.

OK, IT SOUNDS LIKE CRATE TRAINING IS AN EXCELLENT IDEA, BUT TELL ME, SHOULD EVERYONE CRATE TRAIN THEIR DOG?

Not necessarily, but if you are considering crate training as a method of housebreaking, you should ask yourself these questions:

1. Do you find yourself constantly punishing your dog for the same misbehaviors?
2. Is your dog spending more and more time outside and less and less time with the family because of destructive or uncontrollable behavior?
3. Do you have children under the age of ten in your household? Is the once placid Rover now becoming snappish or too rough with your kids?

4. Are you declining dinner invitations and only scheduling errands when you know someone else will be home to make sure the dog doesn't destroy the house while you are gone?
5. Does your dog think his name is "BAD DOG?"

If you answered YES to any of these questions, then perhaps you should think more seriously about crate training. Even if you have none of these problems, crate training is a nice thing to do for your dog. Dogs love their crates. Plus you are preventing your dog from developing unwanted behaviors such as chewing and digging.

So give it a try. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. Crate training is one approach to housebreaking and the prevention of destructive behaviors.

RECOMMENDED READING:

DOCTOR DUNBAR'S GOOD LITTLE DOG BOOK
Dr. Ian Dunbar, James & Kenneth Publishers, 1992
Order direct: 510/658-8588

DOG TRAINING
David Weston, Howell Books, 1990

GOOD OWNERS, GREAT DOGS
Brian Kilcommons, Warner Books, 1990

HOW TO TEACH A NEW DOG OLD TRICKS
Dr. Ian Dunbar, James & Kenneth Publishers, 1992
Order direct: 510/658-8588

If you have any questions, problems or concerns, please call the Humane Society of Santa Clara Valley's Animal Behavior Helpline at 408/727-3383, extension 753.