

Crate Training

“YOU WHAT”.....Want me to put my dog in a CAGE...? THAT’S 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 children to stay away from the dog while he is in his crate than it is to yell “LEAVE THE DOG ALONE” every few minutes all day long.

“What is a Crate” ...basically it is an indoor dog house with a door. It needs to be big enough for your dog to stand up, turn around and lie down in. You would place the crate, out of the flow of traffic, in the room most used in your home such as the kitchen, or family room since your pet is a pack animal and wants to be around the pack (his family) as often as possible. Remember we are not isolating the dog but giving him a personal space to call his own.

“Why Crate Train?” ...Many people crate train their dogs 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, the crate makes housebreaking a breeze, avoids the confusion and punishment resulting from problem behaviors, no harassing the mailman, chewing on furniture, getting into the trash, or eating the pet turtle. While in the crate the dog learns to relax and sleep, this in turn teaches him good habits while his family is away. When you are out shopping, going to the movies or out for dinner you don’t have to worry that your home is being destroyed, because your wonderful puppy is totally at rest in his den (crate), and when you return their will be a happy family reunion, not a one sided screaming match, with your dog.

Other reasons to crate train” Hotels or Motels are much more willing to allow dogs to stay if you bring your dog’s crate....dog’s being shipped by plane feel much more secure and can handle the stress of traveling much easier if they have their own crate to travel in. (Federal Law requires that animals must be in crates when shipped)..

long trips are much easier on a dog that is crate trained....it is less likely to get hurt in an accident, or run out on to the highway and get run over when the car door opens.....or just end up lost in a foreign place running on the streets of a strange city....The crate is a safe place...and represents security to your dog!

“What type of Crate should I Buy?” I recommend the Vari-Kennel crate....It is a molded plastic crate that is lightweight, and easy to clean (they are approved for air travel). I feel this style crate most resembles a den for the dog, keeps any hair and dirt confined it is easy to clean and attractive in the home. I would use a 400 (or Large) Vari-Kennel on my puppies and as they grow put them into a 500 (x-large) Vari-Kennel. You may order them on line or locate them at your local pet shop.

“OK, So now I have the crate...how do I teach the 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.

“CRATE TRAINING YOUR NEW PUPPY”

A young puppy (8-16 weeks) should normally adjust well to a crate as being his “own place.” Any initial complaints he might voice are not normally due to the crate, but rather about his learning to accept the controls associated with his unfamiliar environment. The crate will help him to adjust to his new world more easily and quickly, since he is being introduced to this new world only a small portion at a time.

With the crate situated in its location, the crate needs to be furnished. Bedding can be provided by using an old towel or piece of blanket which can be washed (should an accident occur), a safe chew toy and some worn unlaundered article of clothing such as a tee shirt, or old shirt (to help familiarize him with your scent). Do not put food or water in a puppy crate. The puppy will only upset the dishes, and this is his bedroom.

Make it clear to children that the crate is not a “playpen” for them.. it is the puppy’s room. You should however accustom the puppy from the start that people can reach into the crate at any time, so that the puppy does not become overly protective of his crate.



The first confinement session should be after a period of play, exercise and elimination (ie. when the puppy is ready to take a nap). Place the puppy in the crate with a toy and a treat give the puppy a cue (word to associate the crate with),ie.. crate, kennel or what ever word you would like the dog to associate with going into the crate, and close the door. Leave the room but remain close enough to hear the puppy. Expect some distress at first. Never reward the pup by letting it out when it cries or whines. Ignore it until the crying stops, and then release it. If crying does not subside on its own, placing a lightweight towel or sheet over the crate usually helps, most dogs will give up with this in minutes. REMEMBER do not let the puppy back out of the crate until the crying and or whines have totally stopped. The only exception to this is when you first get up in the morning (or you have been gone longer than 2 hours) and the puppy is probably “loaded” and needs to go out immediately. Pick the puppy up out of the crate and take him outside immediately to his elimination area. As your puppy matures and gains bladder and bowel control, you can expect him to “hold it” longer.

A “crate routine” should be established immediately, closing the puppy in the crate at regular intervals for periods of 1-2 hours during the day. Additionally, whenever the puppy must be left alone for a period of time, or is going to be unsupervised the pup should be crated. A general rule of thumb is that during the day, a puppy can hold off elimination for as many hours as he is in months of age. For example, if you have an 8 week old puppy never make him spend more than two hours in the crate during the day without a toilet break.

“CRATE TRAINING THE 5 MONTH-OLD PUPPY AND ADULT DOG”

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 yummy treats your dog enjoys 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 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. Throughout the day, hide treats in the crate when your dog is not watching. You want to teach your dog to investigate the crate often during the day.

The next step is to repeat the above but each time your dog goes in his crate, use a cue word such as crate, or kennel in a happy tone of voice. It does not matter what word you say, the important point is you say the **SAME** word each time you play the crate game with him. For him to learn a verbal cue such as **CRATE** make take up to fifty repetitions or more, so you may want to split this into several training sessions over a couple of days.

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 cue such as **CRATE**, and as soon as he goes in, give him a special toy (like a stuffed Kong) or feed him his meal and quietly shut the door. Be ready for the verbal onslaught! Stay in the same room, out of sight for a few minutes and then when your dog is quiet for 20 consecutive seconds, open the crate door and let him out. If your dog accepts being in the crate quietly right from the start, then make sure you reward him with quiet praise and some treats pushed through the door as well.

If your dog is being very vocal first try ignoring him for 20 minutes straight. **IF** he continues past the 20 minutes try covering the crate with a lightweight towel or sheet and give a verbal cue “**QUIET**” in a firm voice. Wait until he is quiet for a minute **THEN** let him out while he is still quiet. This is where the persistence and perseverance part come in. The more consistent, firm and unyielding to his complaints you are, the faster your dog will train. On the flip side, make sure you praise your dog when he is calm and quiet as well as slipping him an occasional treat, thru the door, while he is in the crate.

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. Be ready to ignore the dog if he is whining. By the time you reach up to forty minutes, your dog can be safely left 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 the 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 heavily, has eliminated first and gets his special chew toy or treat when he goes in his crate for long periods of time.

“**SUCCESSFUL TIPS**”.....You can make the crate more successful by always acting “happy” around the crate, making sure your dog is very tired if he has to spend more than an hour in the crate and making sure your pet always gets a high value treat (stuffed Kong) to work on when he is in the crate.

“You want your pet to be part of your family and to show appropriate behavior. Your pet wants to please you. A dog crate can help you to develop the bond and relationship you both desire. **USE** a Crate-Don’t **ABUSE** a Crate!”