

Crate Training

There are many reasons you might want to crate train your new puppy. A crate can be invaluable while you are potty-training or teaching your dog the rules of the house, it's a great way to transport your four-legged friend, and it can serve as a safe place for your pup to escape to once he comes to accept it as his space.

Unfortunately, even though dogs are den animals and they like having an area that's all theirs, most won't automatically take to crates — and your pup can even come to fear them if you don't handle crate training in the right way.

The good thing is that puppies don't have any preconceived notions about anything. As long as you follow the below tips, your new canine family member should come to love her crate and may even start going into it on her own when she wants to rest or relax.

1. **Introduce it casually**

The worst way you can introduce your puppy to the idea of a crate is to bring it home and lock him inside it immediately. People don't like being trapped against their will, and neither do dogs. Instead, you should initially treat the crate like it's just another piece of furniture — but one that he can enjoy.

To this end, place it in a part of the house that he frequents, add a blanket and a toy or two, and keep the door open. Then back off and give him a chance to explore it. Some dogs will immediately start sniffing around and going into the crate, which is a great sign. If your puppy isn't quite so bold, encourage him to check it out by placing favorite foods and toys near and inside the crate. The ultimate goal is to get him comfortable with going inside, and this is something that could take days. Be patient with the process.

2. **Use it for meal time**

After she's willing to enter the crate, your next goal is to get her comfortable with staying inside for extended lengths of time. One of the best ways to do this (and create a positive association with the crate) is to start putting her food in the crate.

3. If possible, you want to place the food at the back of the crate so that your dog goes all the way in. Some dogs may not be willing to do this, though, so you can start with the food just inside the crate and slowly move it back with successive meals.

4. **Close the crate**

As soon as your dog is eating his meals while standing all the way inside the crate, it's time to close the door. After he's done eating that first time, open the door immediately. You'll leave him in longer and longer with each meal, adding just a few minutes every time.

It's possible that your dog may whine. If this happens, open the crate immediately and don't leave him in as long next time. However, if he whines again, wait until he stops before letting him out or you will teach him that whining equals open door.

5. **Extend crate time**

Once your dog is hanging out in her closed crate without signs of stress, it's time to lengthen her stay. Use a favorite toy or treat to encourage her to enter the crate, then close it. Hang out by the crate for several minutes, then go into a different room for a few minutes so she gets used to the idea of staying in the crate alone. When you return, don't open the crate immediately. Instead, sit with her again for a few more minutes and then open the door.

Keep increasing the time as you do this until your dog is able to stay in the locked crate for half an hour without your presence. When she's able to do this, she's ready for you to leave her for short periods and possibly even sleep in the closed crate overnight. Make sure you keep the crate relatively nearby for overnight stays though. Puppies usually need to go to the bathroom overnight and you'll want to be able to let her out.

6. **Leaving and returning**

The key here is to make crating seem completely normal and avoid excitement. Encourage him to get into the crate and praise him when he does so, but keep it brief. When you come home, stay low-key and ignore any excited behavior that he shows.

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