



DOG CARE



Crate training

If you like nothing better than coming home from a hard day's work and finding that your dog decided to "go toilet" on the couch or use your favourite slippers as a new chew toy, then crate training isn't for you.

However, if you're like most people, then using a crate to properly train your dog will be time well spent. Crate training takes some time and effort, but it is a proven way to help train dogs who act inappropriately without knowing any better.

Crate training your dog can also reduce stress when your dog has to visit the vet or grooming salon, as this is where your dog is generally housed before and after treatment. Any thing you can do to reduce stress in your dog during this period can only be a good thing.

If you have a new dog or puppy, you can use the crate to limit his access to the house until they learn all the house rules—like what they can and can't chew on and where they can and can't toilet. A crate is also a safe way of transporting your dog in the car or taking them places where it may not be safe for them to roam free. You can use your dog's crate as an inside kennel when you travel and take your dog to dog friendly accommodation.

If you properly train your dog to use the crate, they'll think of it as nothing but their very own safe place and will be happy to spend time there when needed.

Selecting a Crate

Crates may be plastic/fibreglass (often called "flight kennels") or collapsible, metal crates. They come in different sizes and can be purchased from Animal Aid with all proceeds going back into our animal welfare programs and the shelter.

Your dog's crate should be just large enough for them to stand up and turn around then lay back down in. If your dog is still growing, choose a crate size that will accommodate his adult size. Block off the excess crate space so your dog can't toilet at one end and retreat to the other, as seen here in these photos.



The Crate Training Process

Crate training can take days or weeks, depending on your dog's age, temperament, and past experiences. It's important to keep two things in mind while crate training: the crate should always be associated with something pleasant, and training should take place in a series of small steps. **DO NOT RUSH YOUR TRAINING.**

Step 1: Introducing Your Dog to the Crate

- Place the crate in an area of your house where the family spends a lot of time, such as the family room. Put a soft blanket or towel in the crate. Bring your dog over to the crate and talk to them in a happy tone of voice. Make sure the crate door is open and secured so that it won't hit or frighten your dog.
- To encourage your dog to enter the crate, drop some small food treats nearby, then just inside the door, and finally, all the way inside the crate. If they refuse to go all the way in at first, that's okay; don't force them to enter. Continue tossing treats into the crate until your dog will walk calmly all the way into the crate to get the food. If they aren't interested in treats, try tossing a favourite toy in the crate.

This step may take a few minutes or as long as several days.

Step 2: Feeding Your Dog Meals in the Crate

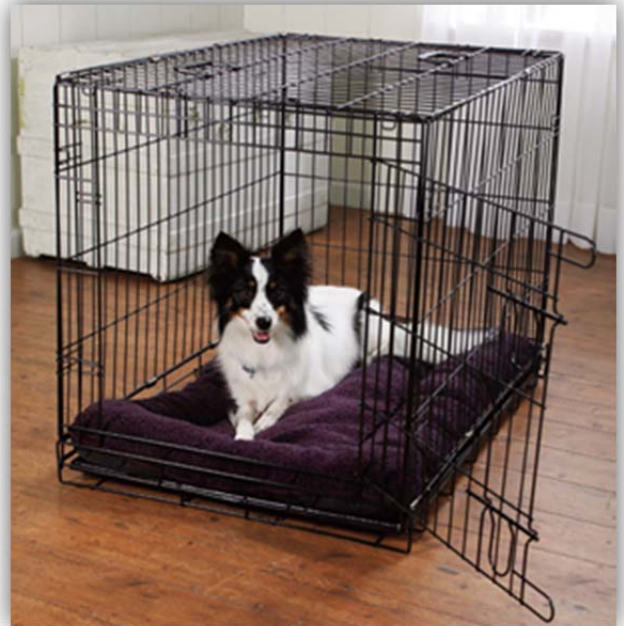
- After introducing your dog to the crate, begin feeding them their regular meals near the crate. This will create a pleasant association with the crate. If your dog is readily entering the crate when you begin, place the food dish all the way at the back. However, if your dog remains reluctant to enter the crate, put the food bowl only as far inside as they will readily go without becoming fearful or anxious. Each time you feed them, place the dish a little further back in the crate. During this period you leave the crate door secured open so they can come and go as they please.
- Once your dog walks freely and enthusiastically into the crate to eat their meal, you can start to close the door while they're eating. The first time you do this; open the door as soon as they finish the meal.

With each successive feeding, leave the door closed a few minutes longer, until they comfortably stay in the crate for ten minutes or so after eating. If they begin to whine to be let out, you may have increased the length of time too quickly.

Next time, try leaving them in the crate for a shorter time period. If they do whine or cry in the crate, it's imperative that you **NOT** let them out until they stop. Otherwise, they'll learn that the way to get out of the crate is to whine, so they'll keep doing it.

Step 3: Conditioning Your Dog to the Crate for Longer Time Periods

- After your dog is eating his regular meals in the crate with no sign of fear or anxiety; you can confine them there for short time periods while you're home. Call them over to the crate and give them a treat. Give them a command to enter, such as "Crate" and encourage them by



pointing to the inside of the crate and lure them in with a treat in your hand. After your dog enters the crate, praise them, give multiple treats to ensure they have a positive association with entering the crate, and close the door; again you can reward them when the door is closed. Quietly go about your business for five to ten minutes. When you return, approach the crate quietly and calmly, and then let them out of the crate.

- Repeat this process several times a day. With each repetition, gradually increase the length of time you leave them in the crate and the length of time you're out of their sight. Once your dog will stay quietly in the crate for about 30 minutes with you out of sight the majority of the time, you can begin leaving them crated when you're gone for short time periods. This may take several days or several weeks.

Step 4, Part A: Crating Your Dog When Left Alone

- Don't make your departures emotional and prolonged, but matter-of-fact. Praise your dog briefly, give a treat reward for entering the crate, and then leave quietly. When you return, don't reward your dog for excited behaviour by responding to them in an excited, enthusiastic way. Keep arrivals low key to avoid increasing their anxiety over when you will return.

Step 4, Part B: Crating Your Dog at Night

- Put your dog in the crate using your regular command and a treat. Initially, it is a good idea to put the crate in your bedroom or nearby in a hallway, especially if you have a puppy. Puppies often need to go outside to toilet during the night, and you'll want to be able to hear your puppy when they stir to be let outside.
- Older dogs, too, should initially be kept nearby so that they don't associate the crate with social isolation. Once your dog is sleeping comfortably through the night with the crate near you, you can begin to gradually move it to the location you prefer, although time spent with your dog—even sleep time—is a chance to strengthen the bond between you and your pet.



Potential Problems

- *Too Much Time in the Crate.* A crate isn't a magical solution. If not used correctly, a dog can feel trapped and frustrated. For example, if your dog is crated all day while you're at work and then crated again all night, they are spending too much time in too small a space. Other arrangements should be made to meet their physical and emotional needs. Also remember that puppies under six months of age shouldn't stay in a crate for more than three or four hours at a time. They can't control their bladders and bowels for longer periods.
- *Whining.* If your dog whines or cries while in the crate at night, it may be difficult to decide whether they're whining to be let out of the crate, or whether they need to be let outside to

toilet. If you've followed the training procedures outlined above, then your dog hasn't been rewarded for whining in the past by being released from the crate. If that is the case, try to ignore the whining. If your dog is just testing you, they'll probably stop whining soon.

Yelling or pounding on the crate will only make things worse. If the whining continues after you've ignored them for several minutes, use the phrase they associate with going outside to toilet. If they respond and become excited, take them outside. This should be a trip with a purpose, not play time. If you're convinced that your dog doesn't need to toilet, the best response is to ignore them until they stop whining. Don't give in; if you do, you'll teach your dog to whine loudly and for long periods of time to get what they want. If you've progressed gradually through the training steps and haven't done progressed too fast, you'll be less likely to encounter this problem. If the problem becomes unmanageable, you may need to start the crate training process over again.

Should you require any further information or support please feel free to contact the Animal Aid team on 9739 0300 or email kennels@animalaid.org.au