

MANAGEMENT TOOLS: INCLUDE CRATE TRAINING FOR YOUR PUPPY OR DOG

A Crate is an invaluable management tool. There are several to choose, such as tethers, head halters, baby gates, kennels, leashes, collars, fences and other ways to effectively manage a dog. However, all dogs should be taught how to use a crate. There are some instances, however, when your dog may not be appropriate for crate confinement. The crate is basically a 'box' for your dog. Construction of the crate can be metal, plastic, fiberglass, wood or other materials. It should have a door so you can close it.

Why consider a crate?

- Safety
- Security
- Housetraining
- Protection of household goods
- Safety while traveling
- During an illness or event that requires your dog to remain 'quiet.'

Often, people believe putting your pet in a crate is mean or inhumane or might cause your pet to be psychologically damaged. However, dogs view the world differently than people. There are situations in your dog's environment that are beyond his coping skills or when a dog is left to his own temptations, the sofa could be a great chew item. Additionally, the crate provides a safe place for him to relax.

The advantages of using a crate:

- You have peace of mind when leaving your dog alone, knowing that nothing can be soiled or destroyed and that he is comfortable, safe, and not developing bad habits.
- You can housebreak your dog more quickly by using the close confinement (potty training is another topic.)

- You can travel with your pet without risk of them getting loose or becoming lost and less likely to interfere with safe driving.
- Your dog can enjoy the security and privacy of his crate where he can retreat when tired or stressed.
- Your dog can avoid much of the fear and confusion caused by your reaction to problem behavior.
- Your dog may adjust more easily to stays at the vet hospital or boarding kennel if you take his own personal portable 'bedroom' with him.
- Since he can more easily adapt to staying in unfamiliar places as long as he has his familiar "security blanket" along, your pet can be included in family outings, instead of being left behind alone.

Purchasing a crate

Crates can be purchased at various pet stores. Purchase a crate large enough for your pet to stretch out, lie down comfortably and stand up. If you have a puppy, it is more economical to buy a wire crate that will accommodate him as an adult, and then partition it to the right size. A movable wire or pegboard partition can be made or purchased. Cover the floor of the crate with a rug or soft pad, an old blanket or buy a washable crate pad. When considering the purchase price of a new crate and the costs of replacing a sofa, woodwork, or carpeting...a crate...is very economical or 'priceless.'

Where should I put it?

Dogs are social animals just like humans. Place the crate in an area where the family spends a lot of time - kitchen, family room, etc. The top of the crate can serve as extra shelf or table space. At night, move your puppy's crate into your bedroom so you can hear him if he needs to go out. Also, consider situating the crate in a high traffic area like the kitchen.

How to Begin:

First, the dog is not 'programmed' to adjust to the crate. You need to teach him that the crate is a safe, secure place to be. You don't just throw the dog in the crate and expect him to adjust. That would be traumatic. Early crate association is important and, usually, indelible. Begin, with small treats, and when the dog isn't looking, drop a couple of treats at the back. Let him discover them on his own. Consider feeding meals inside the crate with the bowl in the back. It is important

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to make the crate a pleasant place to explore. Let's teach our dogs that good things are 'always in the crate.'

Starting a puppy in a crate:

A young puppy should have no problem accepting the crate as a place to sleep. Puppies often cry at first, however, the crying usually is your puppy simply adjusting to an unfamiliar household. The crate does not cause the crying. Now, if you've laid some of the 'ground work' with the treats and meals, your puppy will likely, cry for a moment and lay down and sleep for the evening. However, if he continues to cry do not reward the crying, barking or whining with your attention. Of course, be sure he doesn't need to eliminate. Wait until he is quiet, then praise him or take him out of the crate. Do not leave meals in the crate or feed your puppy immediately prior to confining him. Most puppies will spill water left in the crate. You can leave a safe chew toy in the crate, or a KONG stuffed with goodies, a large bone to chew on and pass the time. A crate should never be used to punish the puppy, however, it is a very effective tool to interrupt unwanted behaviors or you are unable to 'actively' supervise your puppy. Never crate your pet longer than you know he can wait to eliminate, and definitely less than 4 hour intervals during the day. If you occasionally must be gone longer than this, place the crate with the door open in an enclosed area such as a bathroom or laundry room. Place newspapers on the floor of the room to facilitate clean up. Your puppy should soon stop eliminating overnight and then may be crated in his regular place.

Crate training dogs over 6 months old

Often problem behaviors in this age group result from the pet feeling insecure when left alone. A crate can actually help alleviate this anxiety, but it must be introduced gradually and in a positive manner. The dog's first association with the crate should be pleasant. However, if your dog is suffering from separation anxiety or other fears, the crate may not be appropriate. This is when you need to consult a certified pet dog trainer.

If your dog doesn't fit into a category of inappropriate use of a crate, begin with feeding him meals in there, always with the door open. Use a heavy string and tie an attractive stuffed chew-toy to the rear inside so that the dog must lie in the

crate in order to chew on it. Bingo! Pleasant experience. Whenever he enters without being asked, drop or toss a treat or two for him. Remember, don't just slam the door closed and consider your dog crate trained because he is entering and exiting. Crate training an adolescent dog will take time, maybe days or weeks, however, if you are patient, you will teach and train your dog that the crate is a good place to go when he wishes to rest or you need to confine him or 'manage him.' After a few days of practicing those things, begin teaching your dog to enter and exit on a cue. For example, 'go to bed,' 'kennel up,' or 'into the crate,' and throw in a treat inside. Praise your dog as he enters and eats the treat and then ask him out. Encourage him to come out and, when he does, praise him (no food treat for exiting the crate.) Repeat this exercise a few times and then change the order of events slightly. Now, instead of throwing the treat into the crate after you say ask them to enter, wait for him to go in on his own, now reinforce the behavior with the treat. If he doesn't enter, simply wait quietly. Let him problem solve. If necessary begin the steps again until you have strengthened the 'conditioning of this behavior,' consider you didn't practice it enough times for your dog to understand.

Does the crate always work?

Unfortunately, no. There are some animals, usually adults that can or will not tolerate this form of confinement. A few will show no desire to keep the crate clean. Consult a professional when in doubt.

Use - don't abuse!

1. Children should be taught that the crate is a special room for the pet and that they should not pester the dog or pup when it is in the crate.
2. The use of a dog crate is **NOT RECOMMENDED** for a dog regularly left alone all day, although some individual animals can tolerate it. If it is attempted:
 - The pet must be well exercised before and after crating.
 - The crate must be equipped with a heavy, non-tip dish of water.
 - Your pet should get lots of attention and complete freedom each night.
 - Consider having a dog walker or pet sitter come to your house and allow your dog to eliminate and play before re-crating the dog.

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3. Remember, crate or no crate, any dog consistently denied the attention and companionship it needs the dog will find ways to express bored anxiety, and stress.