

Crate Expectations

Why crate training your puppy makes a good start

Crate training is quickly being viewed as one of the best training tools for your puppy. Some people view placing a puppy in crate cruel-like keeping it in a cage, captive and behind bars. However crate training, done in a positive way, can make an excellent start to your puppy's life at home.

Dogs have a strong denning instinct and like to rest and sleep in small, confined spaces. A den provides a dog with a safe place to escape and imparts a sense of security. Crate training can also be an invaluable tool for housetraining. Puppies learn from their mother that they shouldn't soil their sleeping area. When they are still in the whelping box, the puppies will crawl away from their sleeping area to a spot they chose as the toilet area, and eliminate there. They're already innately trained not to soil the area where they sleep. A puppy cannot be expected to go longer than four hours without a toilet break and it is very hard to retrain a puppy that is used to soiling his crate.

Crates are invaluable in keeping puppy safe for short periods (no more than four hours) when you have to leave the house. Electrical cords and other household dangers all pose a threat to curious pups. If leaving pup for longer than four hours, then set up an area in the laundry or kitchen, confined by baby gates, so that pup has somewhere to toilet.

When introducing puppy to a crate it is important to make this a positive experience. Use treats and toys to reinforce that his crate is a fun place to be. Some behaviouralists and trainers suggest that you can initially feed him his meals in the crate, leaving the door open. Start gradually by having the bowl by the opening and then as the days progress, slowly move the bowl further into his den. By tossing puppy safe toys into the crate you will also reinforce that the crate is a positive and happy place to be. Crate association should start out as something pleasant rather than a scary and isolating place.

Use a special word when puppy enters the crate like "go to bed", "to your den", and always make this sound upbeat. Once your pup is entering the crate on his own, you can start closing the door. If you close the door when he's eating, he'll probably not even notice.

If pup initially whines or paws at the door, don't make a fuss. Say something in a gentle tone like "quiet" and wait until he is silent before taking him out. Letting him out while whining or pawing will only reinforce that this behaviour works.

Before shopping for a crate, you must consider the size, material it's made of and design.

- A sturdy wire frame dog crate is ideal as it's easy to clean, durable and offers good ventilation and visibility.
- Dog crate designs that fold may be useful for travel situations.
- Chose a crate size that will accommodate puppy as an adult and allow enough room for him to stand, lie down, or sit in any position in the crate without restriction. Since puppies grow, consider a design that can be sectioned off to allow for expansion. If a crate is too large your puppy is likely to toilet in it and that is exactly what you don't want. Owners of larger breed dogs may want to consider a smaller crate in the beginning and then upgrade to a larger model once pup is a bit bigger.
- Scrutinise the design. When selecting a wire frame crate, consider the size of the wire; be sure your pup's paws won't fall through the grid. Also, check for any sharp edges. Check the front door to see if it is spring loaded, these doors can snap shut on a paw or tail-ouch!
- Plastic dog crates are easy to clean and are durable but offer less ventilation than a wire frame crate. Many of these make perfect travelling crates for car or airline travel.

Always remove your pup's collar when in the crate. This will ensure that puppy will not get snagged on the wire of the crate reducing the risk of serious injury including strangulation.

Over time, you'll notice that pup takes himself off to his quiet, safe spot to retreat. Many puppy-training books published in the last few years have training tips on positive crate training. It's important you have all this information at your fingertips before bringing puppy home.



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