

Guide To Crate/Confinement Training

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Confinement training is intended to provide a comfortable bed, den, or play area for the dog, while restricting access to areas where it might housesoil, do harm to itself, or cause damage. Crate training should be considered akin to placing a young child in a playpen or crib for playtime or sleeping. Other alternatives for confinement include housing the dog in a pen, run, or dog-proofed room, where it might have more freedom to stretch out, chew, or play with its toys. If you don't provide a safe confinement area at times that you cannot supervise, your dog will wander the home unsupervised and will likely engage in destructive chewing, roam through restricted areas, eliminate in undesirable locations, and get into potentially dangerous situations.

The location and techniques used for training should be designed to keep the experience positive. For example, the dog should be encouraged to sleep, nap, or play with its chew toys in its confinement area. On the other hand, if the dog is confined at a time when it is in need of play, attention, or elimination, then escape attempts and anxiety are to be expected. If a dog's attempts at escape are ever successful, then future, more ambitious attempts to escape are likely to occur. Therefore a secure, inescapable form of confinement should be utilized.

Benefits of a crate/confinement trained dog

1. Security – a specific area that serves as a den or resting area for the dog.
2. Safety for the pet.
3. Prevents damage (chewing, investigation, elimination, etc.).
4. Aids in the training of proper chewing and elimination by preventing failure and encouraging success.
5. Traveling: accustoms the dog to confinement for traveling and boarding.
6. Improved relationship with your pet: fewer problems and therefore less discipline for the pet and less frustration/anxiety for you.

Crate training

1. A metal, collapsible crate with a tray floor or a plastic traveling crate works well, provided it is large enough for the dog to stand and turn around. Some dogs adapt quicker to a small room, run, or doggy playpen.
2. Because dogs are social animals, an ideal location for the crate is a room that the family frequents such as a kitchen, den, or bedroom, rather than an isolated laundry or furnace room. If you have observed your dog choosing a particular corner or room to take a nap, or you wish your dog to sleep in a particular location at night, then this might be the best location for the crate.
3. For the crate to remain a positive retreat, it should not be used for punishment. If social isolation (time-out) is used, consider placing the dog in a laundry room or bathroom.
4. A radio or television may help to calm the dog and may help to mask environmental noises that can trigger barking.

Puppies

1. Introduce the puppy to the crate as early in the day as possible. Place a few treats, toys, or food in the crate so that the puppy is motivated to enter voluntarily. Command training (e.g., 'Go to your kennel') can also be useful.
2. The first confinement session should be after a period of play, exercise, and elimination (i.e., when the puppy is ready to take a nap). Place the puppy in its crate with a toy and a treat and close the door. Alternatively, if the puppy lies down to take a nap, move the puppy to the crate for the duration of the nap.
3. Leave the room but remain close enough to hear the puppy. Some degree of distress vocalization is to be expected the first few times the puppy is separated from its family members. Never reward the pet by letting it out when it cries or whines. Ignore it until the crying stops. Release the puppy when it wakes or if you need to awaken your puppy for feeding, play, or elimination (e.g., prior to your departure).
4. If crying does not subside on its own, a mild interruption may be useful. Any interruption that causes fear or anxiety must be avoided since it is not mentally healthy for the pet and could aggravate the vocalization or cause elimination in the crate. During the interruption, you should remain out of sight, so that the puppy does not learn to associate the interruption with your presence. A sharp noise, such as that provided by a shaker can containing a few coins, can be used to interrupt barking. A squirt from a water gun may also be effective. Another way to discourage barking is to use a commercial bark-activated device that produces an alarm or distracting spray when the puppy vocalizes.
5. Repeat the confinement training procedures a few more times before bedtime.

6. Prior to bedtime, the puppy should be exercised and secured in its crate for the night. Again do not go to the pet if it is crying. If the puppy cries in the middle of the night, it should be ignored or a brief interruption can be utilized (as above). Then release the puppy when it is quiet and time to get up. Puppies under four months of age may not be able to keep their crate clean for the entire night, so an early morning walk may be necessary for the first few weeks. Sometimes the best way to reduce distress vocalization is to locate the crate in the bedroom.

7. Never leave the puppy in its crate for longer than it can control itself or it may be forced to eliminate in the crate. If the pup must be left for longer than it can control elimination, a larger confinement area with paper for elimination, a puppy litterbox, or access to an elimination area outdoors by dog door will be necessary.

8. Until a puppy has been housetrained (no accidents for at least four consecutive weeks) and no longer destroys household objects in your absence, it should not be allowed out of its confinement area except under direct supervision. While the puppy is out of its confinement area, constant supervision is required so that undesirable behaviors can be interrupted and desirable behaviors can be rewarded.

The adult dog

1. The most important principles for effective crate training include locating the crate (or confinement area) in a location where the dog feels comfortable about sleeping or napping and gradually introducing the dog to confinement in as positive a manner as possible.

2. Set up the crate in the dog's feeding area or sleeping area with the door open for a few days. Place food, treats, and toys in the crate so that the dog enters the crate on its own. Once the dog is entering the crate freely, it is time to close the door.

3. Follow steps 1 to 4 in puppy training above to accustom the dog to confinement. Repeat these procedures for a few days, gradually increasing the amount of time the dog must remain quietly in the crate before it is released.

4. Finally, the dog should be left in its crate during bedtime or during departures. Try short departures first, and gradually make them longer.

5. Some dogs may adapt quicker to crate training by having the dog sleep in the crate at night.

6. If you are away from home four or more days per week, the pet should not be left in the crate for more than about four hours during the day each day when you are gone.

Crate training problems

If your dog is particularly anxious or eliminates in its crate, then it may be an indication that some part of the crate training technique needs to be revisited.

1. It may be possible that the dog is being left in its crate longer than it can control elimination.

Confine the dog for a shorter time and be certain that it has eliminated prior to confinement.

2. If the crate is overly large some dogs may sleep in one end and eliminate in the other. Consider a smaller crate or a divider.

3. If your dog is anxious or attempts to escape when left in its crate, then he or she may not have been accustomed to its crate in a gradual and positive enough manner. Review the steps above to ensure that the crate is in a comfortable bedding location, that each crate introduction is positive, and that the crate is not used for punishment.

4. If the dog has previously escaped from its crate, this serves to encourage further escape attempts. Change to a more secure confinement area or ensure that the crate is inescapable. It may then be necessary to supervise the dog in its crate for a period of time to help reduce anxiety and deter further escape attempts.