

HOUSE-SAFETY: CONFINEMENT AND CRATE TRAINING

Why do dogs need to be confined?

Dogs are highly social animals that make wonderful pets. They can be effective as watchdogs, are excellent companions for play and exercise, and are sources of affection and comfort. However, with the lifestyle and schedule of the majority of families, dogs must learn to spend a portion of the day at home, while their human family is away at school, work, shopping or recreational activities. During those times when you are away and unavailable to supervise, the pet may still feel the need to chew, play, explore, eat, or eliminate.

How can this misbehavior be prevented?

Preventing such inappropriate behaviors when you are absent involves both scheduling and prevention. Scheduling means insuring that the pet has had the opportunity to play, eat, and eliminate before you leave it in its confinement area or crate. Prevention involves keeping the pet in a confined area where it is secure, safe, and can do no damage to itself or your possessions.

What are my options for confinement?

Depending on the structure of your home, it may be possible to dog-proof the house by closing a few doors, or putting up some child gates or barricades. The dog can then be allowed access to the remaining areas of the house. If this dog-proofing is not possible when you have to leave, confine the dog to a single room, pen, or crate. This smaller confinement area not only provides safety for the dog and protection of the home from damage, but also provides a means of teaching the dog what it is supposed to chew, and where it is supposed to eliminate.

Isn't crate training cruel?

Crate training is neither cruel nor unfair. On the contrary, leaving the dog unsupervised to wander, investigate, destroy, and perhaps injure itself is far more inhumane than confinement. Ensure that the crate is large enough, that the dog gets sufficient food, play, exercise and attention before it is confined, and you return before the dog needs to urinate or defecate.

What are the benefits of crate training?

The two most important benefits are the safety it affords the pet, and the damage that is prevented. The cage also provides a place of security- a comfortable retreat where the dog can relax, sleep, or chew on a favorite toy. By confining the pet to a crate or room when the owner is not available to supervise, behavior problems can be immediately prevented. When you are at home, supervision and rewards can be used to prevent undesirable behavior, and to teach the dog where to eliminate, what to chew, and what rooms and areas are "out of bounds".

Will cage confinement help with housetraining?

Yes. Crate training is one of the quickest and most effective ways to house-train a dog. Since most dogs instinctively avoid eliminating in their sleeping and eating areas, dogs that use their crate as a bed or "den" will seldom eliminate inside unless they have been left in the crate for too long. Crate training can also help teach the dog to develop control over its elimination. As soon as your dog is released from its crate, take it to the designated area and reward elimination at acceptable locations. Since the crate prevents chewing, digging, and elimination on the owner's home and property, owners of crate trained puppies have fewer behavior concerns, the puppy receives far less discipline and punishment, and the overall relationship between pet and owner can be dramatically improved.

Will the crate promote barking?

No. The crate can also be a useful way to reduce or eliminate distress barking. Rather than locking the puppy up and away from the owners at night time or during meal time, the puppy can be housed in its crate in the bedroom or kitchen. In this way the puppy cannot get into mischief, and is less likely to cry out or vocalize, if the owners are in the room. If the puppy is locked away in a laundry room or basement with no access to the owners, distress vocalization is far more likely. If the owner then goes to the puppy to quiet it down or check it out, the crying behavior is rewarded.

What about caging and travel?

Of course, throughout its life, whether traveling or boarding, the dog may require crate confinement. Those dogs that are familiar and comfortable with caging are more likely to feel secure, and far less stressed, should caging be required.