

## **Crate Training: Making Obedience Training Fun and Easy**

You really love your dog ... that's why you got him (or her) in the first place. And you want a dog that's well trained and obedient.

Now you can gain an upper hand in obedience training and help your dog live happy, safe, and secure.

Whether you have a new puppy or an adult dog that's new to your household, you want to be able to trust him to behave properly in your house or apartment. That means allowing him to relieve himself at the proper time and place. It also means behaving himself with your possessions.

Puppies can be especially difficult. For the first few months in your home, puppies require almost constant supervision. With our busy western lifestyles, this makes raising puppies a challenge. You just can't watch your new dog every single minute.

The good news is there's a great way to help prevent accidents when you cannot be there to supervise him.

Just what is this fantastic first step in obedience training? It's not a new video, book, or new method. It's not even a new product you have to go out and buy. No, the best way to start and encourage proper obedience training is through a simple step called crate training.

Crate training is probably one of the best tools you can use to get off on the right foot in the discipline and house training of your new dog.

### **Why Crate Training Works**

Your dog aims to please you. He derives sincere pleasure and enjoyment from figuring out what you want him to do. When you praise and reward him, he likes it even better. Crate training paves the way for you to get the behavior you want from your dog.

Like small children, puppies would run free and unrestricted all day long if they could. Unfortunately, they aren't born with the maturity to do this. In order to handle freedom and keep themselves out of trouble, they have to learn to understand periods of confinement.

The key word is "understand" – it doesn't mean they'll like or appreciate it right away. Most dogs bark and complain during the first few days. Once they begin to accept this new restriction on their freedom, they quiet down and learn to enjoy the experience.

If dogs are crate trained with a good, positive attitude, the sky's the limit on the good behaviors you can expect from your dog. Before long, your dog will think of his crate as "his own space," and will begin to hang out there even when he doesn't have to.

### **Crate Training Is Cruel, Right? Wrong!**

The notion of putting your beloved pet in a "cage" is probably not a positive thought for you.

But crate training is not a cruel thing at all. As a matter of fact, if you do it properly, crate training could be the best thing you could do to begin your new life with your new best friend!

A crate should never be used for long-term confinement. An adult dog, if properly trained, can be left in a crate for as long as nine hours at a stretch. (Try not to leave your

dog in his crate any longer than this.)

Also, a crate should never be used as punishment. As we'll see below, a crate should be a peaceful sanctuary for your dog. You don't want your dog to associate negative feelings with the crate, only positive ones.

### **Should You Train Your Dog Yourself?**

Some people are intimidated at the thought of training their own dog. But rest assured, crate training is easy. You simply don't need the help of a professional. In fact, it's far better if you do it yourself.

World-renown dog trainer, Adam Katz, has this to say:

“There are two reasons why you need to be the one who learns how to train your dog. First, it's your dog. In essence, learning to train your dog will heighten the bond between you and your pet. And in more practical terms, owning a trained dog is like owning a finely tuned sports car. You may have the fastest Ferrari in the world, but if you don't know how to drive it, it's going to sit in your driveway and you won't be able to do anything with it.”

Adam goes on to say:

“The second reason you need to be the one who learns how to train your dog is that, sending your dog away to be trained at a kennel or training facility ensures that your dog will sit in a kennel run 23 hours a day, and get trained for maybe half an hour. Additionally, he's not being trained in a variety of training environments, so he learns to work only at the training facility, and only for the professional trainer.... The only way you will get lasting results with your dog is if you are the one who learns how to train and work your dog.”

### **Benefits of Crate Training**

Why crate train your dog? There are many benefits associated with using crate training as part of your dog's continuing education program.

#### **(1) Obedience**

The first and foremost reason to crate train is obedience. Does crate training lead to obedience? Yes!

Champion dog trainer Adam Katz says that dogs are “social pack animals.” There is the Alpha Dog (pack leader), with the rest of the dogs in the “pack” following behind.

So even though you are a human, and not a dog, your dog still regards you as part of his pack. The way your dog relates to other members of his pack is largely determined by his early socialization. Adam goes on to say that your dog is the happiest when the Alpha Dog (you) is providing him with firm, fair, and consistent leadership.

So, you see, crate training is part of establishing yourself as the Alpha Dog in the eyes of your pooch. The benefit will be that your dog will look to you for leadership and control, instead of the other way around.

#### **(2) Housebreaking**

Crate training is an efficient and effective way to house train a dog. Dogs do not like to soil their resting/sleeping quarters if given adequate opportunity to urinate elsewhere.

Temporarily confining your dog to a small area (such as a crate) strongly inhibits the tendency to urinate and defecate. However, there's still a far more important aspect of crate training. It's an opportunity, actually.

Because your dog doesn't want to urinate or defecate while in his crate, he will need to do so as soon as he is released. This makes for a perfect opportunity for you to praise him on having done a good job – something your dog longs for.

Crate training works much better for housebreaking than confining your dog to a bathroom or spare bedroom. If you lock your puppy in a large room for long periods of time, he will probably relieve himself at one end of the room and sleep in the other.

A much better choice is a properly fitted crate for your dog while you are away. This will take advantage of your dog's "clean nest" instinct, allowing your dog the opportunity to eliminate at the proper time and place.

Does this mean that a puppy will never relieve himself in his crate? No, but this is quite rare. Usually, a puppy or dog that has an elimination accident in his crate was sick or couldn't wait any longer.

### **(3) Discourage Destructive Behavior**

Dogs, especially young puppies, love to chew. It's part of their natural instinct. It's also healthy for your dog's teeth and bones. However, allowing your puppy to roam your house freely could result in several undesirable outcomes.

Puppies could stumble upon dangerous household chemicals. You don't want your dog to encounter things such as pesticides, non-organic cleaners, and the most dangerous of all – automobile antifreeze.

You also have your furniture to think of. Even small toy puppies have been known to chew holes in couches, chairs, and other upholstered furniture. This can become quite expensive to repair or replace. Crate training your puppy is a much cheaper, safer alternative.

### **(4) Privacy**

Your puppy needs a space that is clearly his/her own. This should be a place where only your dog can go. It should also be a place where children and other pets (if you have them) should not be allowed to go.

This should be a sanctuary in which your puppy can go for sleep, peace, quiet, or if she's feeling a bit insecure with things. Even humans like a place of peace and quiet when we're tired or just had a bad day.

It's always a good idea to keep a few toys in your puppy's crate at all times, possibly even an occasional treat. Some dog owners report that putting a blanket over the outside of the crate makes their puppies feel better. Dogs, by nature, are den animals. They like to have a quiet, dark place to hide and sleep. The blanket helps them feel like they're in their own den.

### **(5) Travel Safety**

There are some crates that are made especially for air travel. If and when the time comes to travel via airplane with your dog, you don't want this to be a traumatic experience for him. If he is used to a crate already, this won't be a problem for your dog, or you!

## **How Long Does Crate Training Take?**

This is a tough question, and there's no pat answer. It truly is different for every dog/owner combination.

While there are other benefits of crate training in addition to those listed above, most dog owners agree that you're ready to stop crate training when:

- \* You can trust your dog to urinate/defecate in the proper place at the proper time.
- \* You can trust your dog to be left alone for the day without his exhibiting destructive behavior, such as chewing the furniture or scratching the door to your house.

Unless this is true of your dog, you need to continue crate training until he exhibits acceptable behavior to you. Using a crate the proper way can help maintain the sense of loving companionship until your dog learns what behavior is acceptable.

## **The Crate Training Process**

Okay, here we go. It's time to walk you through the crate training process. Before we jump in, it's important to keep two things in mind while crate training.

- \* The crate should always be associated with something pleasant.
- \* Training should take place in a series of small steps.

Stay steady and consistent, and don't rush.

The Dumb Friends League ([ddfl.org](http://ddfl.org)) lays out these general guidelines:

### **(1) Introduce Your Dog to the Crate**

When you bring home the crate for the first time, place it in a relatively out-of-the-way place in the room you have chosen for it (see locations below). Try to fasten the door open if you can. You don't want the door to hit your dog and frighten him.

Bring your dog over to the opening of the crate. Don't force him to go inside if he doesn't want to right away. Speak to him in a pleasant tone of voice when he is near the crate. If necessary, encourage him by placing a few pieces of food or dog treats at the entrance of the crate.

Don't feel that you're doing something wrong if your dog refuses the treats in the presence of the crate. Some dogs won't go near their crates the first time they see them. Don't force him to enter right away. He will gradually grow accustomed to the crate's presence and the pleasant sound of your voice as he walks near it.

If necessary, toss some treats into the crate to urge him to go inside. If this doesn't work, try tossing one of his favorite toys inside. Your goal is to lower the anxiety level that he associates with his new "den."

He will eventually walk into and out of the crate at will, but be patient with him. This could happen right away, or could take a few days.

### **(2) Start feeding your dog his meals inside the crate**

Your goal in this step is to get your dog to associate pleasant events with his new crate. One of a dog's favorite things to do is eat. So, we want to get him to associate this

with his new crate.

Place his full food dish as far to the rear of the crate as possible. If your dog has an issue with going that far to the rear of the crate, try placing the dish a little closer to the front. Continue to do this until your dog feels comfortable enough to eat without hesitation.

Should you close the door while your dog is eating? Experts disagree on this issue. Try to close the door once the dog begins eating inside his new crate, but watch closely. If your dog exhibits signs of anxiety with closing the door, open it back. At the next mealtime, try closing the door again. Eventually your dog will accept eating inside the crate with the door closed. Again, you, the owner, need to show patience.

After your dog finishes his meal, praise him, but leave him inside the crate with the door closed. These two positive reinforcers (his meal and your pleasant tone of voice) should be enough to encourage him to stay inside his crate after his meal is finished. If he begins to whine to be let out, you may have increased the length of time too quickly. Next time, try leaving him in the crate for a shorter time period.

**Important Note:** If your dog whines to be let out, it's very important that you NOT let him out until he stops whining. This will send the wrong message. You don't want your dog to think that whining gets him what he wants. Exhibit tough love and leave him inside until he calms down.

### **(3) Prepare your dog to begin spending more time inside the crate**

It may take a while for your dog to feel comfortable eating his meals inside his crate. Rest assured, he eventually will. After this, you can confine him there for short time periods while you're home. Call him over to the crate and give him a treat.

Give him a command to enter. Here are some of the more popular ones:

- \* "Kennel Up"
- \* "Den Up"
- \* "Go Home"
- \* "Kennel Time"
- \* "Kennel"
- \* "Crate"

You can try to encourage him by pointing to the inside of the crate with a treat in your hand. After your dog enters the crate, praise him, give him the treat and close the door. Sit quietly near the crate for five to ten minutes and then go into another room for a few minutes.

Once you return, sit calmly again for a short time. Then let him out of the crate. Repeat this process several times a day. With each reiteration, gradually increase the length of time you leave him in the crate. Also, gradually increase the length of time you're out of his sight.

Once your dog will stay calmly in the crate for about a half hour with you out of sight for the majority of the time, you can begin leaving him confined in the crate when you're gone for short time periods and/or letting him sleep there at night.

This may take several days or weeks. However, you must take care to perform crate training the proper way. Once you do, the benefit to you will be a very well behaved dog that you can trust with your home and your possessions.

## **The Wrong Way to Crate Train**

It is possible to misuse (or abuse) crate training with your dog. What is the biggest mistake dog owners make with crate training?

Using the crate as a method of getting a dog “out of the way” for long periods of time.

A crate does get the dog out of the way occasionally, but some people misuse it to get the dog out of the way, most of the time. One study about dog surrenders to shelters found that dogs crated for long periods were more at risk for surrender because people used the crate to put the dog “out of sight, out of mind.”

Crating a dog for eight hours overnight or while you’re at work is not cruel. However, if you plan to do this, the dog must be taken for a long walk prior to crating. Also, make it a point to let the dog out to eliminate immediately after you return home.

People who crate a dog for extremely long periods should question why they wanted a dog in the first place. Dog training expert Adam Katz tells us that you just can’t keep your dog in a crate for an eleven-hour workday to play with him for only 20 minutes before bed. This is no life for a dog (or you).

Another common mistake dog owners make is letting the dog out of the crate too quickly and for the wrong reasons. The first time you put your puppy into his crate, he will whimper and cry. When he does, you will be highly tempted to take him and hold him.

This would be a mistake. Again, do NOT do take him out when he cries. If you do, you will be reinforcing the wrong behavior (i.e., the dog thinks “if I cry, I get let out.”). Don’t defeat the purpose of crate training by reinforcing behaviors you don’t want.

However, done properly, crate training can be a wonderful experience for the both of you. The benefit will be a well-behaved dog that’s happy and secure in his surroundings. You’ll thoroughly enjoy your dog for years and you’ll be proud of him or her as well.

### RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:

Adam Katz, [Secrets of a Professional Dog Trainer](#). Copyright 2003 By Browning Direct.

Jason Oxenham, [Sit, Stay Fetch](#). Copyright © 2000-2004 Libros Media.

Jason Montag, [Doggy Be Good](#). (Jason is also the author of [Potty Professor](#), a good volume on dog housetraining).

Charlie LaFave, [Dog Training Zone](#) , © 2004 NetBiz Marketing Inc.

Brett Fogle, [Dog House Training Secrets](#) (Brett is a dog trainer and also a former pet store owner. If you’re having a particularly frustrating time potty-training your dog, we highly recommend Brett’s book).

## Review Sites

These sites do a periodic review of dog training materials available online. Some are updated monthly (which is impressive). Very objective, and worth a click.

[Dog Training Review](#) – reviews dog training material about training topics other than just crate training.

[House Training Dog](#) – Here, you'll find review of ebooks that pertain specifically to housebreaking (potty training).

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