

Crate Training for the Family Dog

Jane Marshall

Dog Trainer

Crate training for family dogs has become very popular in recent years. Used correctly a crate can be a great asset when teaching your dog good house manners. Dogs that are introduced to crates properly seem to really like them. Dogs naturally find small spaces to be comforting. Who has not seen the dog that crawls under the bed or coffee table when a troubling thunder storm approaches? It is this desire to find a comforting enclosed space or “den” for themselves that crate training is based on.

For the new puppy or dog in a home, with no toilet training or house manners the crate provides a pleasant confinement area where she cannot make mistakes or get up to mischief. When you are not able to supervise your new pet she should stay in her crate with a special food-stuffed chew toy.

Crates are particularly helpful for families with puppies and small children. When parents are not able to supervise the interactions of the children and puppy together, the puppy should be safely crated. The children should be taught the crate is out of bounds to them whether the dog is in it or not. Visiting families may be happy to see your puppy crated as not everyone is comfortable with dogs. The puppy herself though, can still enjoy participating in the get-together by watching from her safe refuge. Used in this way, the crate keeps the puppy a happy participant in social get-togethers, rather than having to be banished to the outdoors or another room.

There are two types of crate: plastic and wire ones. Plastic crates have a more enclosed, cozy feel for the dog, however wire ones can have a blanket or towel thrown over them, when needed, to create the same effect. Most dogs adapt well to either design. The size of the crate should be large enough for the dog to stand comfortably, turn around and lay down in. Keep in mind puppies will not go to the bathroom in the bed they sleep in. So a small crate should be purchased, big enough only for the puppy’s bed. A large crate should then be purchased as the puppy grows. Alternatively a crate large enough to fit the expected size of the adult dog can be used and a “divider” (often sold with wire crates) may be put in to reduce the space. If the crate is too big the puppy may make his bed one end and use the other end for a toilet spot.

Although learning to be in a crate is very easy if it is introduced to a young puppy, dogs of any age can learn to be crated and usually end up enjoying it. When starting with an older puppy or dog, tie back the door and throw food treats or toys inside. Let the dog run in and out without closing him in. Also feed your new dog in his crate. When the dog is starting to voluntarily check the crate out (looking for goodies!) try giving him a stuffed Kong toy and close him in for 5 minutes. Be sure to only allow him out when he is calm and quiet, never when he is barking or fussing (if you can’t quieten him make a loud noise and as he startles, say “good dog” and let him out!) Build up the

length of time your dog spends in the crate. Never leave any puppy or dog in a crate for more than 4 hours. Younger puppies should have toilet breaks every 2 hours. Overnight, puppies 12 weeks onwards, can go 7 hours, younger puppies sometimes need a middle of the night toilet trip.

Make sure you give your puppy or dog some “down time” in their crate when you are home. The easiest way to make your dog dislike her crate is by only using it when you go out. Going in the crate should not be a signal that you are leaving but rather to signal “entertain yourself” time. For shy and needy dogs, this time spent alone is essential. A crate properly used can teach independence and avoid over-bonding with you. Crating can be used as part of an overall confidence building routine. Learning to spend time by themselves when you are home can help those needy dogs make the transition to being alone when you leave and so separation anxiety problems may be avoided.

There are some dogs that have already developed anxieties for whom a crate should never be used. Crating these dogs causes them to panic and they may injure themselves trying to get out. Signs of distress to look out for when crated are excessive salivating, (sometimes the crate or dog may seem wet) a crate that has been “jumped” to another place in the room, obsessive digging or biting at the wire, defecating or urinating in the crate and constant vocalization. If these behaviors occur consult your vet or call Jane’s Doggy helpline: 929-9115

As so many dogs really love their crates many families find they are a permanent addition to the furnishings of their home. The pet supply industry has risen to the occasion and many designer colors and styles are now available. Check them out: your dog will love you for it!!