

Crates and Canines—Den or Prison?

Dogs are den animals. They enjoy having a safe place to go to when they feel uneasy about something or just want to be alone. A crate, when introduced properly, provides a den-like atmosphere for your dog, especially when your dog is young or new to your household. Housebreaking is much easier with a crate and provides a safe place for destructive dogs to stay when left alone. It's important to introduce the crate in a positive way so both you and your dog feel this is a good place--not a prison. By following the steps below, you can make crate training an enjoyable process for both you and your dog.

1. Choose a crate that is the correct size for your dog. Measure the dog's height to the shoulders and length from chest to base of tail; then add 4" -6" to each measurement. The dog should be able to comfortably turn around and stand up in the crate. Be sure the crate is not too big if you plan to use it as a housebreaking tool. The crate can be plastic or wire.
2. Location of the crate is important. The dog needs to feel a part of the family even when in the crate, so choose a part of the house where everyone spends the most time.
3. Drop treats in the crate and allow the dog to go in and out freely. **DO NOT FORCE YOUR DOG INTO THE CRATE!** The dog needs to learn that going in and out of the crate is no big deal.
4. If your dog refuses to go in the crate, try using more enticing treats. You can also start feeding your dog near the crate and slowly start to move the food dish into the crate. Your dog will begin to get hungry enough it will want to enter the crate to eat.
5. **DO NOT** close your dog into the crate in the beginning. Allow your dog to feel comfortable with the idea of going in and out of the crate first.
6. Once your dog is comfortable with the crate, begin to close the door for short periods of time. Just a minute at first, then increase the time. Give the dog lots of praise when you open the door and a treat.
7. As you increase the time the dog is in the crate with the door closed, stay in sight at first. Give your dog a special treat like a KONG (a rubber toy) stuffed with peanut butter and kibble while she's in the crate. Ignore whining and barking. If you let your dog out when she's whining or barking, your dog will only start whining and barking more when put in the crate.
8. When your dog is comfortable with the crate while you are in the room, start to go out of sight for short periods of time and increase the time slowly that you are in another room.
9. Once your dog is comfortable in the crate with you out of the room, start to leave the house. Again, start for short periods of time and increase the time limit slowly always being sure to leave your dog with a special, safe toy for entertainment.
10. After a while your dog will learn that being in the crate is just fine. You can use the crate to keep your dog confined at night or during the day when you are gone. It can also be used for times that you are busy around the house and unable to watch your dog if you are housebreaking or have an avid chewer.
11. Never put your dog in the crate in an angry way. If you need to use the crate as a time out for an overactive or misbehaving dog, be sure to use a calm voice and tell your dog

“Quite time” as you give him a toy in the crate. Leave the dog in the crate only for a short time and then allow them to come out and practice calmer behavior.

12. A dog should never be kept in a crate longer than six to eight hours. If your dog needs to be confined to a crate for eight hours, hire a dog sitter to come mid-day to put your dog out and spend some time playing with your dog.
13. Puppies should only be kept in a crate the same number of hours that they are months in age (i.e. a four-month old puppy should not be in a crate longer than 4 hours) and no puppy should be kept crated longer than five hours. Not only are puppies unable to hold their bladders for long periods, behavior problems from boredom and lack of socialization will occur if puppies are isolated for long periods.
14. If you find that your dog just will not adjust to the crate after following the above procedures and you fear that your dog will get hurt by frantic attempts to get out, you may have a dog that is suffering from separation anxiety. Professional assistance is usually necessary to help desensitize a dog with separation anxiety. Log on to www.apdt.com to find a trainer in your area to help you with this problem or e-mail Center Hill School for an e-mail consultation at cheryl@centerhillschool.com.