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# Crate Training

*Teaching your dog to love his crate*

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## **Don't fret – dogs love (or can learn to love) their crate!**

Dog owners are oftentimes hesitant about using a crate for their dog because they think it's 'mean'. Not so! Dogs, even today's selectively bred domestic dogs, still retain their instinct to den. To a dog a crate can represent a safe, cozy place where they feel secure. And to *you*, a crate can be an invaluable housebreaking tool, a way to control destructive chewing, and a sure-fire method of safe and convenient transport when you and your dog travel together.

## **How big should my dog's crate be?**

A crate should only be big enough for your dog to stand up, turn around and lie down comfortably. If the crate is too large, your dog may be tempted to potty in it, so make sure to get the right size.

## **How does a crate make housebreaking easier?**

Along with their natural instinct to sleep in a den, puppies are born with the instinctive desire to keep their dens clean. Given the opportunity, most puppies will seek out an area to relieve themselves that's far away from where they eat, play and sleep. Using a crate takes advantage of this natural tendency and helps the puppy to learn to control himself in between trips outside.

During the first few months, puppies require almost constant supervision, something that's hard to do with our busy lifestyles. Using a crate helps you to prevent accidents when you can't watch your puppy every single minute. Housebreaking is easier to accomplish when accidents are prevented in the first place, rather than correcting the puppy afterward. Using a crate, a place that the puppy is naturally reluctant to use as a bathroom, combined with a regular feeding and exercise schedule will make housebreaking go faster as well as saving your carpets and your sanity!

## **How does a crate help with destructive chewing?**

Just as you crate an un-housebroken puppy to prevent accidents when he can't be supervised, the same applies to a dog that chews or gets into mischief when you can't be there to watch him. Confined to a crate, a destructive dog is limited to chewing only on the toys you give him, not your furniture or woodwork!

## **How can I get my dog to like the crate?**

Perhaps you've made an attempt to crate train your dog, but he cries when you put him in it. If small children and puppies could have their way, they'd choose to run free all the time without any restrictions. Unfortunately, because they don't have the maturity to handle that freedom and keep themselves out of trouble, they have to learn to accept periods of confinement. The key word is "accept" - it doesn't mean they'll like 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 it.

Growing puppies alternate periods of activity and rest throughout the day. There's no reason they can't do their resting in a crate, like a baby taking a nap in a playpen or crib. By keeping the puppy on a regular schedule of feedings and exercise, you can control his natural rest periods. If you put the puppy in his crate when he's already tired and ready to settle down, he'll get used to his new "bedroom" faster.

## How long can I keep my puppy in a crate?

In the beginning, he should only be expected to stay in the crate for 2 hours at a time and overnight. During his periods out of the crate, your puppy needs plenty of playtime and attention. I like to give puppies at least an hour between crating periods where they're played with, loved, allowed to explore and romp. This burns off their boundless puppy energy and helps them understand that crating is only a temporary thing.

Special toys and treats help make his "room" a pleasant place to stay. Give the puppy a small treat every time he has to go into his crate. Better still, toss the treat into the crate so he can jump in after it. (If you want him to learn to go in the crate on command, say "Kennel" when you toss the treat. He won't understand right away but before long he'll put three important things together in his mind - "Kennel" + Crate = Treat!)

You've given him a reward for going into the crate, now you need to give him an incentive to stay in there quietly. Make his "room" comfortable. Get him a soft but hard-to-destroy blanket or bed. Get him a selection of toys but don't give them all at once, just one or two at a time. Rotate the toys. Puppies get bored easily and switching the toys around makes them seem new and exciting. Teething puppies love chew toys and all dogs love a sterilized beef bone with peanut butter stuffed in the middle. They can spend hours trying to clean it all out.

Dogs learn quickly when their behavior is associated with a reward. Behavior that doesn't result in a reward often disappears when there's nothing in it for them. It's normal for many puppies to bark, whine, howl or throw tantrums when first being crate-trained. *If you let your puppy out of the crate while he's upset, you'll be rewarding him for bad behavior.* The next time he's supposed to go in his crate, he'll cry and bark again because that's what got him out the last time.

For many puppies, just ignoring their complaints is enough to make them stop. If it doesn't get them anywhere, they soon give it up and find something better to do like sleep or play with a toy. Stubborn puppies might need a harsh-sounding "No!" and a rap on the top of the crate to help them get over their tantrums. **Whatever you do, don't take him out of the crate until he's quieted down.**

## **I've got an adult dog that's never been in a crate before. Is it too late to train her?**

No, it's never too late! Older dogs can often learn faster than puppies. At first let her smell and investigate the crate with the door open. Feed her meals in it and have her jump in and out of it for treats. Just as you would with a puppy, you should make the crate a comfortable place to be and keep crating periods short in the beginning. Once accustomed to them, many dogs enjoy spending time in the crates even when they don't have to. Crates are a favorite place to retreat with a new toy or get some relief from a rambunctious puppy or child.

## **Can I use the crate for discipline? Won't this make my dog afraid of the crate?**

A crate can be a wonderful training tool when used correctly. Used incorrectly, or over used, it can be an instrument of fear and torture. Every dog, especially new puppies, should have a crate. Dogs are descended from wild canines that used dens for shelter. Most wild canines dig the den, a small, cozy, and safe haven to sleep and rear puppies. In our homes, domesticated dogs appreciate such a haven or den that should become the dog's 'room,' a refuge where the dog can rest and feel safe.

A crate is probably one's best tool when it comes to the discipline of housetraining. The "discipline" aspect comes from a dog's innate urges not to urinate or defecate in its den or bed. Even young puppies prefer to move as far away from their sleeping quarters as possible to relieve themselves. Usually, a puppy or dog that has an elimination accident in his crate was sick or couldn't wait any longer.

Crating a puppy or dog overnight, or when the family is away during the day, also administers a passive form of discipline by preventing an energetic, curious dog from chewing up human belongings or electric cords. A crate keeps the dog safe, and out of trouble and is handy at times when it is necessary to have repairmen in or during holidays when the house is full of company.

Bad crate discipline occurs when the crate is overused, or misused. Yes, 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. Crating a dog for eight hours overnight or while you are at work is not cruel, especially if the dog is taken for a long walk or jog prior to crating. People who continuously crate a dog for longer periods should question why they wanted a dog in the first place.

It is common to punish a human child by sending him to his room. Dogs are not children in fur coats, and this method is futile in teaching your dog a lesson. Consider the following all-too-common scenario:

- ➔ Max chews up a shoe (or messes in the house, digs a hole, or commits some other serious transgression).
- ➔ Owner yells “no,” grabs the dog, and puts him in his crate.

Let’s analyze this from Max’s point of view. Whether caught in the act or punished minutes or hours later, Max was probably not aware that the act he was committing was that horrible in human terms. He understands only that his owners are upset and that he came when he was called only to be punished for something he didn’t even know was bad.

When disciplining a dog for committing bad behavior, it is important to catch him in the act of doing the deed. Dogs live in the moment and do not associate something they did five minutes or a half hour ago with the present. Often, an owner finds the mess and punishes the dog, not knowing whether the ‘sin’ was committed five minutes, a half hour, or longer ago. All the dog associates with being called, punished, then shoved in a crate is that, “I came, I got punished for it, and I certainly won’t make the mistake of coming when called again.” He also learns that the crate is a negative, scary place.

Used for the discipline of keeping the dog safe until trustworthy, and housebreaking, a crate is a wonderful training tool. Used inappropriately, it can cause distress and hamper training progress. Used correctly, it may look like a crate to you, but to a dog, it’s his private room.

## **Some hints for using a crate:**

- ➔ When telling the dog to go into his crate, use a command such as “kennel.”
- ➔ To get the dog accustomed to staying in the crate, give him meals or treats in the crate with the door open.
- ➔ Put some washable bedding and a toy in the crate for comfort.
- ➔ When using the crate for discipline or to interrupt unacceptable behavior patterns, limit the incarceration to 10-15 minutes.
- ➔ If the pup or dog soils the crate, don’t scold. Instead, make arrangements so he’s not left alone for such long periods.

**Call Ann at CompliantK9 if you’d like more specific information about crate training, or to develop a crate training schedule specific to the needs of you and your dog.**