

# Crate Training

## Why does my dog need to be crated?

Crating is recommended for MANY reasons including potty-training, proper human/dog bonding, avoids damage from chewing, helps with separation anxiety, and gives dog a nesting area. Crating is also useful for safety when your dog is alone during the day or night (a young dog can easily chew up electrical cords and be electrocuted!).

## How long do I have to use a crate?

If crate training is done correctly, there isn't necessarily an end date for crate use, you will find that your dog loves the crate and the security it brings him. You can leave the door of the crate open even when you are home, and the dog can come and go as he pleases. Do not be offended if the dog wants to take a nap or chooses to relax in there – it's a sign that he feels comfortable and safe in there.

## How do I start crate training?

### 1. Get the dog used to the crate

- ✿ Get a crate that is big enough for your dog (if they are a puppy, you may want to account for their adult size). Place the crate in the location where you would like your dog to sleep, and put the dog-bed in there. Leave the door open and let the dog sniff in and around the crate and get them used to it being there. Maybe for first few times, throw some treats in there so that the dog goes in voluntarily (just let them go in and back out) so they learn it is not a scary experience.
  - ✿ Feed the dog in the crate. Close the crate door and leave them in there for about 30 min after feeding (for young puppies leave them for only 5 min after feeding, they will need to go to the bathroom quickly). Feeding in the crate makes it a positive experience. Take them out to go to the bathroom as soon as you open the crate door, this ensures/reinforces house-training.
  - ✿ When introducing the crate, start with small increments during the daytime – put the dog in the crate for 20 minutes several times a day – then increase the time. Start by staying in the room with the dog (just read or watch tv – do not pay attention to the dog) but have them be in the crate, and correct any barking or whining.
  - ✿ It is quite common for a dog to protest the first time he or she is locked in the crate. If the dog cries or barks: verbally correct them – do not accept this behavior. When giving a verbal correction, do not look at or go to the dog (otherwise you are rewarding them with attention). A firm, loud “No!” should work. (If needed, reinforce your verbal correction with a loud noise, such as a clap of the hands or shaker-can. A water-spray bottle also really hits home as a correction with most dogs).
- ➔ It's easy to lose your temper, but remember that this is temporary and getting mad will not help. Work through this calmly, patiently, but firmly. It can be challenging and frustrating, but focus on it as a training exercise and do not let your emotions get into it. Firm, consistent corrections allow your dog to see and trust you as a leader: getting angry will damage your relationship with your dog. If you keep working at it consistently and calmly, you will see results.

## 2. Nighttime

- ✿ To crate train a dog to sleep at night is pretty easy - they may protest (barking/ whining) for a couple of hours but it *usually* only take 2-3 days for them to settle in and be quiet at night. Can be up to a week. Have patience! Ignore it (or yell “No” from your bedroom, if that works) and they will stop.

## 3. Leaving the dog alone / Going out

- ✿ If you leave the house, it all depends on the dog: some settle quickly, some will cry and bark for hours and try to destroy the crate. You have to keep practicing by leaving them alone. Hopefully you have built up to this by getting the dog used to the crate as explained above. If you stay calm about it, so will they. A routine can help (like, you always leave for work in the morning after walking and feeding them, so they get used to this being normal). All of this can take several weeks or months. Stay calm, and have patience!
- ✿ If you come home and they are going nuts with excitement or barking in the crate, ignore them (we know it’s hard!) and wait for them to calm down and relax a bit, then let them out when they are calm. If you consistently do this, it will encourage them to stay calm while you are away as well.
- ✿ When letting them out of the crate, do not talk to or praise the dog - just open the door and walk away. Don’t make too big a deal of it – be neutral\*. (If you give the dog loads of attention as soon as you let them out of the crate, they will see being let out as a reward to look forward to, and they will start to crave getting out of that crate, in order to get that reward. You don’t want a dog who is desperate to get out, because it defeats the point of him being happy and calm while crated.)
- ✿ A bone or chew in the crate may help anxious dogs and give them something to focus on while in the crate – never give them that bone outside the crate, use it only to make being in the crate rewarding for the dog.
- ✿ Ideally, no more than a maximum of 4 hours in the crate during the day.

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## Other tips

- ✿ Do not give in to their whining or barking or scratching at the crate door by letting them out, otherwise they will keep doing it because it “works” for them to get out. Correct the behavior you don’t want (barking/whining/scratching) with a firm “NO!” or by ignoring, and reward the behavior you do want (i.e. calm and quiet) by letting them out. → Don’t let them out while they are barking or scratching!
- ✿ When getting a new dog, make sure to crate them from day 1 (!) and on the very first day, make sure you leave the house for 30 min or an hour. Ideally, listen out for your dog to be quiet before you come back inside. You want to set the house rules right from the start and get the dog used to being alone in his new home. You don’t want to make the new dog become “needy” of constant human attention and company. Repeat/practice this as often as you can, from the very beginning.  
→ This is incredibly important. Wanting to spend as much time as possible with your new dog is

understandable but, in the long term, it will not help your dog. If you hang out all weekend with your new dog and then go to work on Monday, your dog won't understand why he/she is being left alone after all that time together and may develop separation anxiety, which is much harder to undo once it is established. Therefore, do yourself and the dog a big favor and start practicing "alone time" from the very beginning.

- ✿ Keep in mind - each dog is different: sometimes it's super easy, sometimes you have to listen to the "singing" (crying/barking) for quite some time - they will give up at some point. And remember: Make sure the dog is quiet before you let them back out – letting him out while he is barking/whining/scratching the gate only rewards that kind of behavior.
- ✿ Most dogs accept and enjoy sleeping in the crate at night very quickly; but they may still cry or bark during the daytime when you leave the house. This behavior is actually not about the crate, but about separation anxiety. Obviously you can't correct the dog while you are away, so sometimes you just have to ride it out... If you need help specifically to counter separation anxiety, we can provide training [[bluemandog.org/training/](http://bluemandog.org/training/)], but step one is sticking to the golden rule: → if you come home and they are barking, do not let them out. Wait for calm and quiet (or calmly but firmly correct them to be quiet for a few moments) before you let them out.
- ✿ If your dog doesn't want to go into the crate, feeding them in the crate helps, and once you put the food down inside, they generally will head for the food (or a toss a treat). If that doesn't work, a gentle push on the behind should get them in, otherwise calmly lift your dog into the crate. Do not give up! The dog must go in. BUT: don't get angry or start manhandling your dog, otherwise the dog will quickly learn that going into the crate is a struggle and a fight and it will only get worse and worse. Get the dog to go into the crate calmly and gently every single time, and before you know it, the dog will learn to go in voluntarily.
- ✿ NEVER ever put a dog in a crate for "punishment" - the dog does not understand that human concept and will only learn to relate the crate as something negative. So whenever you crate the dog, do it calmly and gently and keep it a neutral\* experience.

\* We ask people to keep it "neutral" (rather than "positive") because very often, people want to reward and praise the dog when he/she is inside crate, however, if the dog is anxious or stressed and you start praising them, you are only rewarding that state of mind and will make his stress/anxiety of the crate worse. Keep it neutral so that he learns for himself that the crate is nothing to worry about.