

## *Crate Training a Puppy*

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One of the first goals of a newly acquired puppy is to teach it not to eliminate in the house. There are many methods to achieve this, and most are successful – eventually. But most breeders, trainers, and veterinarians will agree that the best method for housetraining a puppy is the appropriate use of a crate. In addition, the appropriate use of a crate helps keep the puppy out of unsafe situations when left unattended.

Many owners unfamiliar with crate training may think that keeping the puppy in a cage is “cruel”, but the truth is that, when used correctly, the dog learns to look upon the crate as his own place. Since the dog likes to sleep in a den-like setting, he will often seek out the crate when he wishes to rest undisturbed, assuming crate training has been approached in a positive manner.

The reason for a crate’s success in housetraining a puppy is simple. If a puppy can possibly help it, he will not soil his sleeping area. Spending time in a crate helps the puppy develop the ability to “hold it”, which eventually will transfer to when the puppy is loose in the house also.

The first step in crate training is appropriate selection of a crate. The crate should be large enough for the puppy to stand up, turn around, and lie down. The crate should NOT be large enough for the puppy to designate one end the “sleeping area” and the other end the “potty area”. If a puppy is expected to grow significantly, you may need to place a divider in the crate to temporarily reduce the size, or plan to upgrade to a larger crate as the puppy grows. Any type of a front entry crate is acceptable, as long it is sturdy, and in good repair. A box that you have to place the puppy down into is not acceptable. The crate should be located in a medium traffic area. If too far away from the family, the pup won’t seek out its use. Do not place the crate in your bedroom. Our goal is for the puppy that wakes up in the night to settle back down, not to demand attention to go outside. If placed in the bedroom, owners will hear every small stirring. By responding to the puppy waking up by taking it outside, you are reinforcing the idea that if he fusses, he gets attention.

The second goal is to convince the puppy that he “loves” the crate. Every exposure to the crate should be a positive one. The crate should be the primary feeding place (don’t keep a water bowl in the crate). By having to go into the crate to eat, the puppy is learning to associate the crate with pleasurable experiences. Each time the puppy is placed into the crate, give him a small treat. Leave a favorite toy in the crate. These steps all work toward making the crate a pleasurable experience.

When crate training, the goal is for the puppy to either be with you and supervised, or in the crate. When first removed from the crate, the first stop should be outside, as most puppies need to relieve themselves after periods of rest, eating, or strenuous exercise. After eliminating outside, the puppy can be released into the house with vigilant supervision. Most puppies are slow to learn to tell the owner they need outside, so it's your job to make sure the puppy has ample opportunity to go outside to relieve himself. When taken outside, always accompany the puppy to the same "potty area", use the same verbal command, and supply abundant praise when the puppy eliminates. Remember that many accidents occur just after coming back in from outside because the owner didn't allow enough opportunity for the puppy to both urinate and defecate.

When a family member is unable to provide adequate supervision of the puppy, he should be placed in the crate. In addition, the puppy should be crated when no one is home, and during the night. It is not unreasonable for the puppy to spend 6-8 hours at a time in the crate. Expect the puppy to soil the crate on a consistent basis until he gets the concept of "holding it" until let out of the crate and outside to eliminate. Eventually the puppy will realize that it's much more pleasant to wait until let out to urinate or defecate than to go in the crate and then have to lie in it and smell the odor. The ability to wait to relieve himself will then start to transfer to time spent out of the crate also.

Each puppy will grasp the concept of housebreaking and crate training at a different rate, but in each pet, the end result will be rewarding.