



Training Plan: Crate Training a Dog

Why this is useful for your dog to know: Teaching your dog to be comfortable in a crate will have many benefits for both you and your dog. The crate can be a place of comfort and security for dogs, as well as a tool to help with potty training or prevention of destructive behaviors. When trained correctly, many dogs enjoy their crate time. Dogs are often required to live in crates for a time if there is an emergency, such as an evacuation, or an injury.

End behavior: The dog will happily and comfortably enter his crate on cue, and stay in the crate for up to four hours with or without people at home.

Method 1: Food lures and puzzles

Step 1: Place a few treats in the rear of the crate and leave the crate door open. When the dog is freely going in and out of the crate, go to Step 2. Tips:

- If he needs more encouragement, drop a trail of treats leading into the crate.
- If the dog won't enter the crate for any treats, proceed to Method 2 below.

Step 2: In one motion, point to the crate and toss a treat from your pointing hand into the crate so that the dog goes into the crate to get it. Practice this 10 times and then go to Step 3.

Step 3: Do the same pointing motion, but this time don't toss a treat from that hand. If the dog goes into the crate, praise him and give him a treat from your other (non-pointing) hand. Practice this 10 times.

Tip: If he doesn't go in when you merely point, go back and repeat Step 2.

Step 4: Standing next to the crate, say "crate" and then make the pointing motion to the crate. When the dog enters, praise him and give treats from the non-pointing hand. Practice this 10 times.

Step 5: Standing next to the crate, say "crate" and don't make the pointing motion. Wait for the dog to go into the crate for the verbal cue only. Practice this 10 times. When the dog is going into his crate for the "crate" cue only, go to Step 6.

Tip: If he doesn't go in for the "crate" cue only, make the pointing motion to the crate. Keep working with him this way until you see that he's starting to go in for the "crate" cue only and isn't waiting for the pointing motion.

Step 6: When the dog enters the crate, briefly shut the door, then toss an extra-special treat (EST) into the crate. When the dog has finished eating it, toss another EST into the crate, open the door, and allow the dog to exit.

Step 7: Gradually increase the time that the dog is in the crate with the door closed. The easiest way to accomplish this is by giving the dog a food puzzle or frozen, stuffed Kong to occupy him while he's in the crate. Always use an EST to reward the dog for going into the crate and right before coming out of the crate. When the dog can spend 15 minutes in the crate, go to Step 8.

Step 8: While the dog is in the crate, begin leaving the room for short periods of time. As in Step 7, give the dog a frozen Kong or food puzzle. You can also add a favorite toy or two to the crate, as well as blankets or other comfort items. Increase the amount of time until the dog can spend 30 minutes comfortably in the crate without someone there.

Method 2: Feeding meals in the crate

Step 1: Begin by placing the dog's meal in a bowl as near to the crate as he will go.

Step 2: Gradually move the bowl closer to the crate over the course of a few meals.

Step 3: When the dog is relaxed about eating near the crate, begin placing the meal just inside the crate.

Step 4: Gradually move the meal toward the back of the crate.

Step 5: When the dog is entering the crate with his entire body, proceed to Step 1 of Method 1.

Proofing

Proofing means teaching the dog to generalize the behavior in different contexts.

Handler: Have different people give the dog the "crate" cue and reward him for going into the crate. If initially he doesn't go in for the "crate" cue only, they should make the pointing motion after they give the cue.

Duration: Gradually increase the amount of time the dog spends in the crate, including leaving the house for a short period while the dog is in his crate working on his Kong or food puzzle. Do not crate a dog for more than four hours at a time, except at night.

Distractions: While the dog is in the crate, talk quietly in an adjoining room, and then gradually increase the volume and the number of people talking. You can also play music, turn on the TV or run appliances.

Location: If you will be traveling with your dog and his crate, when he is staying in the crate comfortably for hours, move it to other rooms of the house and have him stay in it there. If possible, bring your dog and his crate to a friend's house and have him spend short periods in it there, then increase the duration. Repeat in other locations until your dog is comfortable in his crate wherever you take him.

Notes

Never force a dog into the crate. The goal of crate training is to make the crate a safe, happy place where the dog will want to go and spend time. If the dog appears anxious or unhappy about being in the crate at any point during training, back up in the plan to the previous step.

Don't ever put the dog in the crate as punishment. Doing so may make the dog afraid of his crate, or it may even seem like a reward (since the crate is a place that he should love to go).

If you get stuck between steps, create an intermediate step with duration that your dog is comfortable with. Don't rush: Take it at the dog's speed.