

CRATE TRAINING YOUR PUPPY OR ADULT DOG – by P. Kalbaugh

Many people feel it is cruel to crate a puppy or a dog. All those negative associations about cages and zoos and such. I was under that impression myself when I was convinced, by my sister 6 years ago, that it was one of the most valuable things that my new puppy could learn. It keeps the puppy safe from chewing things like electrical cords and your new shoes when you cannot be around to supervise. It can be considered the same as a playpen for a baby. It is also an invaluable tool in house training a puppy. Puppies learn from their mother that they shouldn't soil their sleeping area. When they are still in the whelping box, the puppies will crawl away from their sleeping area to an area they chose as the potty area, and eliminate there. They are already innately trained not to soil the area where they sleep.

Using the Dog's Natural Denning Instinct

First, let's look at dog behavior in the wild. Wild adult dogs will naturally find a den or safe area to sleep. When the dam whelps the pups in the wild she sets up a den and keeps it clean until the pups are old enough to go outside on their own. She teaches them it is not okay to potty in the place where they sleep. Domestic dogs will also naturally den. You will often see a dog sleeping under a table or desk or next to a piece of furniture if no other area is provided for them to den. It is not cruel to develop his habit from the time you bring the puppy home. In fact, it is cruel not to give the pup or dog a safe area they can call their own.

Setting the Rules From the Beginning

If your puppy whines when you first put him in his crate it is probably because he would rather be snuggled up close to you the way he was with his litter mates. If you allow. If you allow the puppy access to your lap, bed, couch or chair when you first get the puppy then it will be harder to eliminate these behaviors as the puppy grows up. Think of what the adult size of your dog will be and decide if you have room in your lap, bed, etc. for the adult dog. You must decide before you bring the puppy home what the "rules" will be and then stick to them.

Help from the Breeder

If you're lucky, the breeder has begun to crate train the puppies while they are still in the whelping box by providing a crate for them to sleep in. If this is the case, then all you have to do is to allow the puppy to get used to it's new crate, it's smells, and your home and your job will go much faster. If possible, get a familiar piece of bedding from the breeder, one that has the smells of the litter on it. Place this in the crate along with the other pads or towels. This will help the puppy feel at home. You can return this to the breeder once the puppy is used to his new home.

POSITIVE ASSOCIATIONS

Crate training should all be done positively with no negative associations. When you first bring the puppy home from the breeder, have the crate ready and comfortable for the puppy. I put a towel or a washable pad in the crate, possibly a pillow so it is an inviting area for the puppy. (My dogs' crates are as comfortable and inviting as my own bed!) I get a small yummy treat (small piece of raw hot dog works well) and allow the puppy to sniff it and then lure the puppy into the crate with the treat. When the puppy goes into the crate to get the treat and explore the new area, I just leave the door open and let him come out as he wishes. I don't force the pup into the crate and I don't make him stay in there the first several times. I then repeat putting a treat in the crate, allowing the puppy to go in on his own for the treat. I do this several times and praise the puppy gently while its in the crate and associate a word or phrase forgoing in the crate. My word association is "kennel up". I use the word association AS I'm putting the treat into the crate and the puppy is following it in. Do this about five times and then quit for a while. Repeat this procedure several times the first day.

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Closing the Crate Door

When the puppy is going in after the treat comfortably and when the puppy has just finished playing and piddling and is tired, lure the puppy into the crate with the treat as you have done before only this time close the door. I also put a **new toy** in the crate at this time. Something the puppy hasn't seen before and something that is interesting and will keep his attention for a few minutes. After I close the door, I sit on the floor in front of the crate and talk to the puppy if necessary. If the puppy cries or whines, I put my fingers through the grate in the door to reassure the puppy that I am still there. Usually, they will only whine for a short while and may even fall asleep if they are tired. I stay there until the whining subsides and the puppy calms down and then open the crate door. 5-10 minutes usually. If the puppy happens to fall asleep, great! I let him sleep in the crate until he wakes up and then it's right outside to go potty. I don't use a lot of praise and fanfare when I open the crate door and I ignore the puppy for a few minutes after he is out so that he doesn't get the impression that getting out is much more fun than being in the crate. I do not let the puppy out of the crate until he is quiet for at least 30 seconds and has calmed down if he has been whining. I might try and distract him with another toy to give him a chance to be quiet so I can let him out while he is quiet but I WILL NOT let him out, especially the first time, until he IS quiet. I don't yell or correct in any negative way. I just make up my mind that I will calmly wait the puppy out no matter what.

The First Night at Home

If you have gotten your puppy during the day and had time to do the above steps, great! The puppy will already be familiar with going in the crate after a treat. If not, and you want to begin the puppy's life at his new home sleeping in a crate here's what to do. I play with the puppy till he's tired, make sure he has pottied outside and place the comfortable crate (with pad and towels, etc.) on a chair or table right next to my bed where I can reach it while I'm still lying down. My nightstand is set up for this purpose. I remove any collar that might be unsafe, place or lure the tired puppy into the crate (possibly with a safe toy) go to bed and turn out the lights as usual. If the puppy whines, I place my fingers in the grate and talk softly to the puppy until he falls asleep. I may lose a little sleep that night and possibly the next time but I will NOT open the door for the puppy for at least four hours. (I repeat: the puppy has successfully pottied just before this!). I do not get angry at the puppy or yell at him but I do not give in and let him out either. If the crate is comfortable and warm enough, the lights are out and you are right there to talk softly to him and let him lick your fingers, then usually he will fall asleep within an hour, less if he is tired. At eight weeks of age you cannot expect the puppy to go more than four hours without pottying. So, as soon as the puppy whines after waking up, have your sweats, shoes and shirt ready to take the puppy outside. Dress yourself quickly before you open the crate, carry the puppy to the potty area immediately, praise softly and gently for a job well done, bring him back in and without getting into a play session with him, return the puppy to his crate, turn the lights out and go back to sleep. If the puppy fusses for a while, talk softly and put your fingers in the grate of the crate. Two or three nights of this at the most and your puppy will be used to the routine. If you happen to sleep through the puppy whining and he is forced to potty in his crate because he can't hold it, don't blame or scold the puppy. It is your responsibility to get the puppy out BEFORE he has had a chance to soil his den. Clean it up using a urine neutralizer (I use a light vinegar and water solution) put clean towels or pads in the crate and return to your routine. Set an alarm clock if you have to. The crate should not be too big for the pup, otherwise there will be enough room for the puppy to soil in its crate and not think about it as soiling his sleeping area. Later on, after the puppy is used to its routine and after he no longer needs to go out every four hours, you can put the crate on the floor of your bedroom or somewhere else in the house.

Crating When you Leave the Home

At some point you have to go to work or go out somewhere and can't take the puppy. He's made it through his first day and night at his new home. He is familiar with his crate and it does not have any unpleasant

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associations linked to it. Make sure the pup has been exercised and has pottied. It is helpful if he has played a bit and is tired. Take off his collar and remove any **unsafe toys** that may be in the crate, lure him into the crate with a treat and your association word or physically place the puppy into the crate gently. Close the door and leave the house without further do. No talking to him, etc. He may whine a little. You might have to explain to your neighbors that you are crate training your new puppy to keep him safe from chewing things like the electrical cords and your new shoes while you are away and so he will develop good potty habits. Explain that he may whine for a little while after you leave. Hopefully, they will understand. Don't stay away too long. An hour or two, is optimal. If you have to go to work and have no other choice, then arrange to come home at lunch to feed, exercise and potty the puppy during your break or have someone else come in and do this for you.

A puppy cannot be expected to go longer than four hours without a potty break and it is very hard to retrain a puppy that is used to soiling his crate.

A Place to Get Away From It All

After the puppy has grown up a bit and is used to being put into his crate when you leave and at night when you sleep, you will see something interesting happen. When the puppy is tired and wants some time alone, possibly away from the children (who should not be allowed access to the puppy's crate for play purposes) he will go to his crate and curl up and go to sleep. I leave the doors of my crates open and my dogs frequently go there to take a nap on their own volition.

OTHER REASONS TO CRATE TRAIN EARLY

Flying

Suppose you have to fly your dog on a plane. They must be crated for this. Flying is stressful enough for the dog who is already crate trained but add the stress of never having been in a crate to a dog who has to fly for the first time. Can you see a reason for the dog to be used to a crate?

Boarding

What if you have to go out of town and need to leave the dog in a boarding kennel? A crate trained dog will understand and adapt to this situation easily. Usually, you can bring the dog's own crate with you to the kennel and allow the dog some comfort in having his own bed to sleep in.

Crating in the Car

Keeping the puppy/dog safe in the car is another reason to crate train. Nobody likes to think of what would happen if they were in a car accident. Car doors can fly open and the dog, if uncrated, stands a good chance of leaping out into traffic and getting hit by a car or running off because they are scared. If you have your dog crated in the car when in an accident the dog may get banged around but the crate will most likely protect the dog from being hit, may help contain the dog in the car itself, and will keep him from being lost if the car doors fly open even if the crate is expelled from the car. If you are hurt in the accident the emergency services people are more likely to keep your dog safe and contained if the dog is in a crate and they can easily transport the dog to a safe area.

Crating Adult Dogs

Although it is probably easier to crate train when the puppy is young, you can still train the adult dog to accept the crate. Use a treat or favorite toy and lure him into the crate with the door open, same as I explained for the puppy. Keep doing this until the dog will readily go into the crate on his own. After the dog will readily go into the crate for a treat or toy, make the dog lie down in the crate with you sitting on the floor in front of the crate for just a few seconds and then let him come out. Keep this up for several days or a week, as long as it takes for the dog to become comfortable with lying down in the crate. When the dog seems comfortable lying down, close the door for a minute or two, and stay there to talk to the dog same as we did above with the puppy. When the dog has been quiet for a few seconds, open the door and let the dog come out and ignore him for a minute or two so that coming out isn't associated with a lot of praise. The idea is to praise gently and quietly WHILE THE DOG IS IN THE CRATE and ignore him

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for a few minutes when he comes out. Keep doing this without any negative associations until he's comfortable in the crate for longer periods of time. Most dogs can be crate trained using this method no matter how old they are. Keep it positive but don't give in either. Try and build up the time gradually, if you can. If you need to crate train your dog to fly, try and give yourself as much time as possible. A month or more is optimal. If you don't have that much time, try to do as many repetitions as you can during the time you have. Wait an hour or so in between training sessions. The more repetitions you can do without stressing out the dog and maintaining positive associations the better. Quit if the dog or you are getting stressed.

DO's & DON'TS

- Never crate a dog with a choke collar on. Dogs can choke themselves to death. It's probably a good idea to remove any collar while the dog is in the crate.
- Never crate a dog with a leash attached! Same reason.

Safe Toys

- Use safe toys only, nothing the dog or puppy can get apart and choke on while you're not there. Rawhide chewies are NOT good to leave with unsupervised dogs. Squeaky toys need to be monitored because the squeakers can be removed and swallowed and cause the pup to choke.
- Good toys that are safe: KONGS. These are made of hard rubber that is almost impossible to destroy. They come in many different sizes and have a small opening in one end. Some people put a little peanut butter inside that gives the pup/dog something to do for a while after you leave. Not a lot of peanut butter, just enough to keep them interested.

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