

The Advantages of Crate Training

A crate, or indoor kennel as it is sometimes called, is usually made out of metal although plastic ones for air travel and fabric types are also available. In essence they are cages in which to put your dog and can be used as your dog's bedroom area.

Crates have long been accepted and taken for granted by dog show exhibitors, obedience and field trial competitors, trainers, breeders, groomers, veterinarians and anyone who handles dogs regularly.

Pet owners often perceive the enforced close confinement of a crate as cruel – 'It's like a jail – I'd never put my dog in one of those' is a very typical reaction. Owners consider their dog to be an extension of their families and think the lack of freedom is inhumane and may cause psychological damage. The dog's perception is very different and they consider their crate to be their own private, special place that satisfies their 'den instinct', making them feel safe and secure.

How To Use

House Training.

If used for your new puppy, by shutting the door from night one onwards, house training is established early, as it is highly unlikely that your puppy will soil its bedroom area overnight. Ideally the crate should only be big enough for your puppy to stand up, turn round and lie down as any area bigger than this could encourage him/her to soil in the corner of the crate. Do not put puppy pads in the crate as this encourages you puppy to use one end for toileting! Water is not put in the crate overnight, as long as access to water is on offer up until one hour before bedtime. Obviously make sure he/she has eliminated before going to bed. Covering the crate at night can give it a 'den' effect and can help create a feeling of security, as can providing your puppy with a blanket bought home that smells of their littermates.

Crating your puppy for regular naps in the day, without toileting first will help build up bladder control – after all, if your he/she can hold on for 7 hours or so at night, being crated for an hour or so should be no problem. Try not to open the door if they are scratching and whining to get out as this reinforces the behaviour.

Coping Behaviour.

All dogs should have the ability to cope when we are not around. Allowing your dog to follow you constantly around the house places a huge amount of stress on him/her, so establishing from the beginning that the crate is a nice happy place to be diminishes the chances of separation anxiety becoming established and allows you to spend some time away from your dog. It is incredibly important that the crate is not just used for times that you are away from the house. This can build up a negative association for your dog. Ideally, they should be crated even when you are at home, maybe while you are hoovering, or perhaps when you are busy upstairs and are unable to keep your eye on him/her. If you are going out for any length of time, the crate can be used for up to a maximum of 4 hours in the daytime.



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Transporting.

Crates are a safe way of containing your dog whilst in the car. They are especially useful for dogs that jump up at the windows barking at passers-by etc, and can be particularly beneficial for dogs that suffer from car-sickness. Covering the crate with a blanket or towel can reduce anxiety and visibility. When going away with your dog, crates are an invaluable way of guaranteeing that no damage is done to other people's property or your hotel room, plus it gives your dog security in a strange place.

Quiet Time.

If you are bringing a young puppy home to a house where there are children then the crate can provide a safe haven around little ones. Sometimes it is the puppy that needs to escape the children, rather than the other way round! Excessive nipping/mouthing etc can happen if the puppy is given too much stimulation without regular naps, and can provide a quiet place for your puppy to eat and sleep. Make it very clear to children that the crate is not a playhouse for them, but a 'special room' for the puppy, whose rights should be recognised and respected, although you should accustom the puppy from the start to letting you reach into the crate at any time, lest they become overprotective of it.

Destructive Behaviour.

Not many people know that there are two teething periods – one at around 5-6 months old when the adult teeth appear and another at approximately 9 months when the adult teeth are settling into the jaw which can create itching and irritation. To prevent valuables being chewed when you are not around, use the crate!

If introduced properly, crates can provide security for both you and your dog. It is vital that your dog has positive associations with the crate: feeding and putting chew toys inside will establish this. Do not use the crate as a punishment area. The manner in which an older dog is introduced to the crate is of paramount importance. Once it is set up, bedding and toy installed, let your dog investigate the crate thoroughly with the door open. If he/she shows any reluctance to enter, encourage him/her with a tit bit, in a happy voice and praise profusely. Repeat this two or three times and you will find he/she will go in and out quite happily. When your dog feels confident, place him in the crate with a tit bit, close the door, and praise him. Leave for five seconds, praise lavishly and let him/her out. Very gradually increase the length of time you leave the dog alone in the crate, always praising on return. When your dog is not confined, leave the door open so that they can go in and out at will.

A crate is **not** recommended for dogs that have to be frequently left for long periods of time.



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Most dogs, if introduced properly will happily accept a crate but there will always be those who simply can or will not tolerate this form of confinement. The reaction is not nearly as common with a young puppy as with an adult dog, especially those who have been rescued from an unknown background. It may be that these dogs have suffered some kind of traumatic experience and can usually cope as long as the door remains open. This is quite rare and most average pet dogs can be successfully trained to use a crate. If, despite every effort using positive methods, the dog is really frantic and miserable when in the crate, forcing him to use one is unfair and could result in injury if he is determined to break out.

Crates are very easy to find -check out eBay for bargains; they are also available at Argos and Tesco Direct although these may not be made of such a heavy gauge of metal as those sold in pet shops. If no longer needed, advertise free of charge in our newsletter – we always have people who are looking for one second-hand.