



CRATE TRAINING

By: Patricia Calderone, CPDT-KA

One of the most helpful tools for a new puppy of dog owner is a “crate” or “kennel.” Teaching your dog to love the crate will be a useful tool throughout the dog’s life. For example, by teaching my dogs to love their crate I am able to enjoy having my dog with me while staying in hotels, without worrying about the dog making a mess while I slept or slipping out the door and getting lost; I’ve hosted parties with many guests without the dog disrupting anything; and finally, it makes traveling by car much easier and safer.

Conditioning your dog to the crate can be a lot of fun, and a tool which provides a lifetime of benefits, so take your time and don’t rush. You can get your dog interested in the crate by a number of methods such as placing treats at the back of the crate, feeding the dog in the crate itself, or putting a “Kong” (a puzzle toy which dispenses treats) in the crate. It is important to create a positive association with the crate, and to not use it as a form of punishment, during the training process.

To begin building the positive association:

- Lure your dog into the crate with a tasty treat;
- Once the dog goes into the crate, give him more treats and then encourage the dog to come back out. (don’t give the dog treats for coming out);
- Repeat the process over the next couple of days, adding your cue, such as “Go to Bed” or Kennel up” when luring the dog into the crate (whatever cue you decide on, use it exclusively);
- Before throwing a treat into the crate, say your cue, and if the dog goes in the crate, great! now you can play a game of having your dog going in and out of its crate on cue;
- Avoid shutting the door of the crate at this point, as if may send a message to your dog that you will leave;



CRATE TRAINING

By: Patricia Calderone, CPDT-KA

- When your dog has been conditioned to enter and exit the crate on cue, begin adding the step of closing the door, only close the door slightly and do not lock it, giving treats through the wire of the door;
- then open the door quickly (keep the door closed for only a few seconds to begin with, and then slowly begin increasing the amount of time the door stays closed;
- after the dog is visibly acclimating to being in the crate, begin locking the crate for short periods of time and then releasing the dog;
- by gradually increasing the amount of time the door stays locked, your dog will become used to and comfortable with the door closed and latched.

To keep your pooch more comfortable and relaxed, you can put a blanket with your scent on it in the crate. You can make the crate more comfortable for your dog by placing a padded mat or piece of carpet in the crate. Be sure to use items that can be easily removed and washed or replaced, especially if you are still housetraining your dog.

As mentioned previously, once your dog is comfortable in its crate, never use it as a form of punishment. To do so could potentially ruin the training that you have instilled upon your dog. When using a crate with your pup or older dog, the dog may whine or bark when kenneled. If you know that the dog doesn't need to go out, than the best thing to do is to ignore it. Acknowledging the dog, or telling it to "be quiet!" when it has no idea what the cue means will only reinforce the whining. If the whining becomes a problem, you may wish to try to put the crate in your room for a period of time. The pup may be comforted knowing that you are in the room. Having the crate in your room does not need to be permanent. As the pup grows, you can condition it by moving its crate outside your room, and later to a different room all together.

Crates come in a variety of sizes and styles. Two of the most common are hard plastic and wire-frame. It's a matter of personal choice when selecting your kennel. I live in a busy household, so I choose the hard plastic variety to better isolate my dogs when they are in the crate; additionally, the plastic crates are designed for travel, so if you plan on



CRATE TRAINING

By: Patricia Calderone, CPDT-KA

taking your dog on an airplane, plastic is best. However, wire crates are much easier to break down and store, and they give the dog more visibility. In the past, I have used wire crates with blankets covering them effectively, as well.

The size of the crate is very important for a couple of reasons. First, and most obvious, the crate needs to be large enough to properly house the dog. Second, dogs' natural instinct is not to soil the place where they sleep, which means that if the crate is just large enough for them to turn around and lay down in, they are much less likely to soil the crate. This is especially helpful when housetraining your dog, and one of the real reasons I like using a crate to housetrain. You don't want to get a crate too large, as it could potentially allow the dog to use the back of the crate to eliminate, while using the front to sleep. If your crate is a bit too big, or if you want to buy a crate that your pup will grow into, you can use a divider to block off the back of the crate (most wire crates come with a divider). As your pup grows, move the divider to allow enough room, but keep the area just large enough for the pup to turn around and lay down in.

Crate training is worth the time and investment to keep your dog safe. You can condition your puppy or your adult dog to the crate, it's never too late!

Clicker Canines can help crate train your dog, it's a fun process.

For more information or call Patricia at 708-557-4913.

www.clickercanines.com