Crate Training

Crate training can be a useful way to give your dog a comfortable den of their own where they can relax and feel safe. Crates can also be useful when travelling with your dog, or if they ever need to be confined during recovery from surgery. Teaching your dog to enjoy spending time alone within a crate, even when you don't need them to, means that whenever you do need to use a crate, they will already be comfortable doing so!

Choosing a crate

Crates can be made of fabric, metal or plastic and are often collapsible and lightweight. Choose a design you can easily set up and carry. Your dog should be able to stand up, turn around, lie down and stretch out inside their crate, so make sure the one you choose is large enough for them to be comfortable inside.

Introducing the crate

Position your dog's crate in a calm, quiet place where they're unlikely to be disturbed when relaxing inside.

Make it as cosy and comfortable as possible with your dog's bed, blanket and a non-spill water bowl inside. You might want to place some of your dog's toys and treats inside too. You can cover the top and sides with a blanket to exclude draughts and reduce sounds from outside. Fix the door securely open so there's no risk of your dog accidentally being shut inside while they're learning about it.

Allow your dog to become used to the crate in their own time. They might investigate by sniffing around it or even venturing inside. Have some treats ready so if they do go inside you can reward them for making good choices!

During the introduction and early stages of training your dog needs to know they can come out of the crate quickly and easily, so they feel safe at all times. This will give them confidence and help to create the positive feeling we want them to associate with being inside the crate.

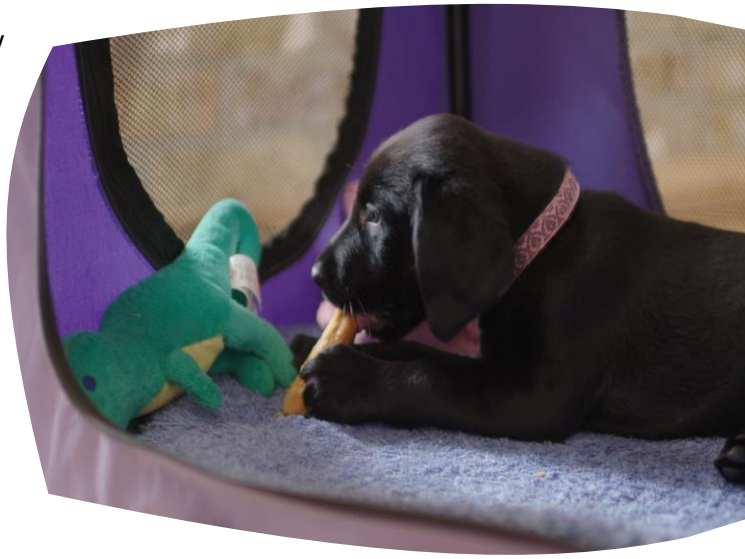
Teaching your dog to go inside

Once your dog appears relaxed with the sight and smell of the crate, you can start to actively encourage them to go inside. As with all training, how quickly you progress will depend on how your dog feels. Going at your dog's pace means they can remain confident while they're learning. Keep training sessions short and fun, and practise during calmer times of day when they're naturally more ready to relax, such as after they've been out for a walk or had a play.

- Prepare some of your dog's favourite treats. Position yourself next to the crate so you can easily drop treats into it.
- Start by dropping a few treats onto their bed through the top of the crate. Your dog should already be comfortable entering the crate so should happily move inside for the treats.
- Once your dog is inside, continue to drop treats into the crate. When dropping your treats, try to drop them when your dog is not looking. This will help place focus on the crate, rather than on you.
- If your dog is struggling and appears reluctant to go into the crate, then make it easier for them. Place the treat in the doorway to begin with and repeat this stage a number of times to build up their confidence, before dropping the treat just a little further inside.
- If your dog moves out of the crate at any point, stop dropping treats and wait. Don't call them or try to lure them back in, just wait until they return. Once they return, begin to drop treats again.
- You are now beginning to teach a settle in the crate. You can find out more about this in our **Settle Handout**.
- Try practising at different times of the day. Over time, you will need less treats and your dog will begin to choose the crate as a place to go to relax!

When your dog chooses to go to their crate, don't make too much of a fuss so you don't disturb them, but gently tell them what a good dog they are, so you capture this lovely moment and add to their good feeling! You can also drop a treat in from time-to-time when you notice them calmly lounging.

You can offer your dog a long-lasting chew or food-releasing toy, or even feed them their usual meal inside the crate. Not only will this continue to build their positive associations with the crate, but it will encourage them to spend longer inside.



Closing the door

Once your dog is happily spending time inside the crate with the door secured open, you can start teaching them that the door closes. We want them to feel confident about this so take things steadily.

If at any stage your dog shows any sign of worry, such as whining or scrabbling to get out, then go back to a stage where they feel comfortable. Spend time repeating this stage to build their confidence before gently trying to move on again.

- To begin with, start to close the door slightly when they are inside. Don't secure it yet though, so they can still exit if they need to. Repeat this a few times.
- Providing your dog is comfortable with this, you can start to secure the door for a brief moment, before opening it again so they can come out if they choose to.
- Gradually build up the length of time your dog spends inside the crate with the door secured closed. Remember you can offer them a tasty chew to enjoy when they're inside, and you can drop in a treat and give them some praise when they're relaxing!

At all other times when you're not doing a training session, leave the door secured open so your dog can come and go as they please.

Stepping away from the crate

When your dog is relaxing and enjoying themselves inside the crate, start to engage in your own normal day-to-day activities, so they learn that you can be active yourself while they stay in the crate. Stay in the same room to begin with though.

Leaving the room

Your dog might feel comfortable being in their crate while you're in the same room, occasionally dropping in treats and praising them. However, this might change if you were to leave the room, as this is when some dogs can start to feel worried.

By following the previous steps your dog will already understand that being in their crate is a good thing, you now just need them to know it's still good even when you're not in the room, or even the house!

Start by giving them their meal, long-lasting chew or food-releasing toy and closing the crate door. Then slowly move towards the door of the room to see how they react. If they continue enjoying themselves, then you can pop out of the room briefly before returning and carrying on with your own activities, occasionally throwing a treat into the crate or praising them.

Gradually build up the length of time you remain outside the room, initially always making sure your dog has something enjoyable to occupy themselves with inside their crate. They will be learning that they don't need to rely on you being there to have a lovely time.

Using the crate in everyday life

It's important that the crate is never used as a punishment. A dog can't understand the reason for this and might start to feel unhappy about being in the crate, excluded from the fun they were having moments before!

All dogs have different and individual needs, and they shouldn't be left alone for longer than they can cope with. Even though a dog might really love their crate, they shouldn't spend too much time inside as they might become stiff and might also need the toilet! Please speak to your vet for advice on how long it's appropriate to leave your dog alone for.

Always make sure your dog is having a good time in their crate, whether enjoying their toys, chews or simply snoozing - the safer and more comfortable they feel inside, the happier they'll be spending time in their crate when you need them to!

Contacts for further support



We provide lifelong telephone-based behavioural support for all our adopted dogs. If you need help for your **Dogs Trust dog** please email:

postadoptionsupport@dogstrust.org.uk

Everyone else can access support by emailing our training and behaviour helpline:

behavioursupportline@dogstrust.org.uk

Your nearest Dog School Team are also happy to help and can be contacted via:

dogstrustdogschool.org.uk

The advice contained in this handout is of a general nature and is no substitute for specific behavioural or veterinary advice. If you are worried about your dog, then do consult your vet.

A dog is for life ®
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