



Drs. Mark Ledyard, Jen Knepshield, Beth Rhyne, Jaclyn Amber, Mary Peters, & Denise Henry
208 Charlotte St. * Asheville, NC 28801
Business: 828-232-0440, Fax: 828-253-5640
www.charlottestreetanimalhospital.com

CRATE TRAINING YOUR PUPPY

Adapted from GOODPUPPY Social Club and Nikki Meyer Educational Effort, Inc.

Crate training is widely encouraged by veterinarians. A dog's natural instinct is to sleep and rest in a den. When used properly, crating can be a wonderful tool for housetraining your puppy and increasing his or her feeling of security.

Using a crate as a housetraining tool serves two important purposes:

- ♥ Securing your puppy to prevent him or her from having full access to your house. When unsupervised, puppies are more likely to get into trouble or hurt themselves.
- ♥ Puppies have a natural tendency to avoid soiling their den or sleeping area. Therefore, when crated properly, it is unlikely that the puppy will eliminate in his crate. Crating creates a normal routine for elimination and teaches bladder/bowel control. Be aware that the length of time your puppy can go without eliminating increases with age. Each puppy is different, as they are individuals. Pay close attention to your puppy's elimination behavior, so that everyone may have the best experience possible in training.



Remember, a secure puppy is a happy puppy!

Depending on the age, temperament and previous experiences of your puppy, it may take several days to several weeks to adequately crate train. Keep the following points in mind while trying to train your puppy to a crate:

- ♥ The crate must ALWAYS be associated with something pleasant for the puppy.
- ♥ Training should take place in a series of small steps, each of which we will cover. Try one step at a time, not moving on until your puppy is comfortable. Don't try to do too much too fast or force your puppy into the crate. Forcing a puppy will only result in more resistance and may even prevent the dog from ever having a good experience with crating.



What is a Dog Crate?

A dog crate is a full enclosure with a top, four sides and a door. Crates are available in a variety of sizes and shapes to accommodate any puppy. These enclosures may be constructed of wire, wood, fiberglass, or plastic. Crating is intended to provide confinement for security, safety, housetraining, protection from the dangers of the household, protection while traveling and general control of your puppy's behavior.

Why Use a Crate?

Using a dog crate *humanely and correctly* is advantageous for both you and your puppy:

- ♥ Enjoy peace of mind while leaving your puppy at home alone. Nothing can be destroyed and he or she is protected and comfortable.
- ♥ Housetrain your puppy more quickly by using close confinement to encourage a regular "routine" for outdoor elimination and to prevent accidents at night or while left alone (to prevent bad habits from forming).
- ♥ Effectively and easily manage your puppy at times when he or she may be underfoot (meals, visitors, when moving heavy or large objects, while workmen are in the house, etc).
- ♥ Feel comfortable traveling with your dog with less risk. The driver will not be distracted by the puppy, and the dog will not be able to escape onto dangerous roads during stops. Dogs feel more secure being in unfamiliar surroundings when they have a little piece of home with them everywhere they go.
- ♥ Your puppy can enjoy the privacy of his own "den" when feeling tired or stressed.
- ♥ Your puppy can avoid the fear and confusion caused by your reaction to problem behaviors.
- ♥ Your puppy can be spared feelings of frustration and isolation by being confined to uncomfortable, low traffic areas of the house such as the basement, garage, or being left outside; rather your dog will have comfortable, familiar surroundings when being restricted or left alone.
- ♥ Your puppy will learn bowel/bladder control and also learn to associate elimination with being outside.

What Size Crate Do I Need?

Use these perimeters when choosing a crate for your puppy:

- ♥ The crate should be large enough for your puppy to stretch out on his side without being cramped and be able to sit up without hitting his head (a crate that is too large is better than one that is too small).
- ♥ If your puppy is very small, you can reduce the size of a larger crate by creating a partition made of wood or wire (some crates are sold with these partitions), or just place a cardboard box in the back of the crate (if your puppy chews on the box, remove it and use something else). The amount of space can then be increased as your puppy grows. Bear in mind, though, that a crate that is too large for a young puppy defeats the purpose of providing security and promoting bladder control.

Crating Concerns: Cruelty or Compassion?

Upon first introduction to crating, it is common to feel resistant to the idea. You may even think that the crate resembles a jail cell and appears punishing. Crating can be inhumane if used improperly. However, crating plays on a dog's natural instinct to "den." In the wild, a wolf mother rests in the den, bears her young in the den, and nurses them and keeps them safe from the dangers of the world in the den. If crating is introduced and maintained as a "safe haven," most dogs will come to adore their crates.



Here are some situations that ensure a *negative* experience for a puppy and are inhumane:

- ♥ Improperly introducing your puppy to the crate (leaving the puppy in the crate without taking proper steps to acclimate or conditioning the dog to crating).
- ♥ Placing the crate in a low traffic area of your home, thereby causing feelings of isolation and abandonment.
- ♥ Using crating as a form of punishment or "time out."

Use but Don't Abuse!

The use of a dog crate is not recommended for dogs regularly left alone all day, though some pets may learn to tolerate it. Young puppies can control their bladders for several hours but not for the entire workday. Leaving a puppy in a crate for 8-10 hours is not appropriate. A puppy that is forced to soil his crate as a result of being crated too long is being treated unfairly and will be more difficult to houstrain. If you must leave your puppy in the crate for long periods of time, please implement the following humane training steps.

Crate or no crate, any dog that is denied the human companionship it needs is going to be a lonely pet - and will ultimately find ways to express boredom, anxiety, depression and stress.



5 Steps to Crating Your Puppy

A young puppy (7-16 weeks) normally should accept a crate at his or her own pace. Many problems your puppy may have acclimating to the crate are most likely not caused by the crate itself, but by learning to accept a new environment. The crate training process actually helps dogs adapt to change more quickly.

Stage 1: Making Space for the Crate

Placing the crate is an important aspect of the crate training process. Here are some tips:

- ♥ The crate needs to be placed in a high traffic, “people place” in your home. Choosing a room where your family spends a lot of time makes your puppy feel welcome in your home rather than banished, isolated, or punished.
- ♥ Position the crate in a corner or cover it with a blanket to help your puppy feel more secure.
- ♥ There are crates available that resemble furniture if you feel a traditional crate may be an eyesore. These crates work especially well because they are sturdy and secure, and can easily recreate the feel of a “den”.
- ♥ Children in the home need to understand that the crate is the puppy’s special place, where he or she can feel safe and be alone. The crate is not to be a play area. Simultaneously, your puppy should learn to tolerate you or anyone in your family reaching into the crate without becoming aggressive/protective.

Stage 2: Introducing Your Puppy to the Crate

Use these steps to introduce your puppy to their crate:

- ♥ Always remove all collars and tags before crating your puppy. Accessories can get caught on the crate and harm an unsupervised puppy.
- ♥ Put a soft blanket or old towels in the corner of the crate.
- ♥ Bring your puppy over to the crate and speak in an excited, happy tone of voice.
- ♥ Make sure that the door to the crate is securely opened so it won’t accidentally hit and frighten your puppy.
- ♥ Place yummy tidbits just inside the door of the crate, and then gradually all the way inside to encourage your puppy to enter. If your pet doesn’t go all the way at first, this is ok. **DO NOT FORCE THE PUPPY TO ENTER.**
- ♥ Repeat this process until your puppy will calmly walk into the crate to obtain a piece of food or retrieve a toy.
- ♥ This process may take several minutes or several days depending on the personality and early experiences of your puppy.

Stage 3: Feeding Your Puppy in the Crate

After introducing your puppy to the crate, feed regular meals inside it for a while. Feeding your puppy in the crate will create pleasant associations and decrease fears that he or she may have. As with each prior step, using baby steps will help ensure a successful experience:

- ♥ If your puppy is entering the crate with ease before this stage, you may place the food bowl all the way at the back of the crate.
- ♥ If your puppy is still reluctant to go into the crate, place the food bowl at the opening of the crate, or as far into the crate as the puppy feels comfortable going in, then move the bowl a little farther back into the crate each time you feed, always bearing in mind his or her comfort level.
- ♥ Once your puppy is comfortably standing in the crate while eating, shut the door. At first, open the door as soon as he or she is finished eating and offer praise for being such a good puppy! (And then of course, immediately go out together for a potty break.)
- ♥ Each time you feed the puppy in the crate, keep the door closed a few minutes longer, until he or she can stay in the crate for ten minutes without protest. (See the pattern here? Baby steps!) If your puppy begins to whine to be let out, you may have increased the time too much too soon, so back down a little next time you feed.
- ♥ **IMPORTANT:** Make sure you always let your puppy out of the crate while he or she is calm and quiet, not barking and whining. Letting the puppy out while he or she is protesting indicates that barking and whining will be rewarded with freedom. Your puppy is very smart and reinforcing this negative behavior may set the stage for other behavior problems throughout his or her life.

Stage 4: Conditioning For Longer Periods of Time

Once your puppy is eating meals comfortably in the crate, you can start to leave him or her in the crate for short periods of time while you are home. Now you are ready to progress to the next stage:

- ♥ Use small treats to teach your puppy the “kennel up” command. Hold a treat in your hand, and call your puppy to the crate. Point the treat towards the back of the cage and say “kennel up” (or whichever command you prefer). If he or she goes right in, reward with a treat. If not, it’s ok. It may take a few tries if your puppy is reluctant. Only provide the treat if the puppy is inside the crate.
- ♥ Once your puppy is in the crate, shut the door and sit near it for about 5-10 minutes, but pay your puppy NO attention. Then, walk into another room (out of sight) for a few minutes. When you return to the crate, sit quietly next to it again for a short period before you release your puppy.
- ♥ Repeat this process several times a day, gradually extending the time you are out of sight so your puppy will acclimate to being left alone in the crate. Once your puppy will sit quietly in the crate for 30 minutes, you can start to leave him or her for short periods of time while you are gone. You may also start to let your puppy sleep in the crate. Just be sure that the crate isn’t too far away, so you can still hear him or her whine, signaling the need to eliminate at night.

(You could move the crate closer to your bedroom during the crate training process, then incrementally move the crate farther away to another place in the home.)

- ♥ Create a “crate routine” by leaving your puppy in the crate for 1-2 hour intervals, even if you are home the entire time. This helps to prevent episodes of separation anxiety.
- ♥ There are many “distraction treat toys” available at your local veterinarian’s office or pet supply store that will help your puppy stay occupied. These toys usually have holes in them in which you can place food and treats. Such toys are helpful because they challenge puppies to concentrate and think in order to get the food out, which leaves your dog occupied for long periods of time. You can even feed your puppy daily meals this way!

If things are not going well at first, it’s ok! Be consistent, firm, and patient with your puppy. If you must leave your puppy alone, you will be protecting him or her from the dangers of the household and ensuring the safety of your personal items.

Stage 5: Crating When Left Alone

After your puppy can quietly sit in his or her crate for 60 minutes without becoming anxious while you are home, you may start to crate your puppy while you are not home.



- ♥ Use the normal “kennel up” command to get your puppy into the crate. Make sure you vary the point in which you crate your puppy as you get ready to leave. A range of 2-20 minutes prior to leaving should suffice.
- ♥ Do not make departures emotional or prolonged. Once your puppy is crated, provide a treat and quietly leave them alone while you prepare to leave. Prolonged goodbyes can create problems of separation anxiety.
- ♥ When you return, although it is exciting to see your puppy, do not make a big deal about coming home. This will only reinforce over-excited behavior and *may cause problems of separation anxiety*. When you enter your home, wait for your puppy to be calm (without giving eye contact or attention). Once he or she is calm, quietly open the crate and take your puppy outside to play (and potty of course)!! This behavior effectively teaches your puppy that you want them to be calm. It is one simple thing you can do that can prevent many unruly behaviors in the future.
- ♥ Continue to crate your puppy periodically while you are home. This prevents your puppy from associating the crate with always being left alone.

If you must leave your puppy in the crate for long periods of time, please follow all guidelines below:

- ♥ He or she must be *well exercised* (20-30 minutes of aerobic activity) both before and after crating.
- ♥ He or she must also be given lots of personal attention, be allowed freedom during the evening and be able to sleep near the owner.

- ♥ Ideally, someone should check on your puppy during the day to offer him or her attention, exercise and fresh water.
- ♥ The crate needs to be large enough to allow your pup to be able to comfortably stretch out fully on his or her side, stand up and turn around.

Remember: The crate is supposed to be loved and cherished;
a space where your puppy feels safe and loved.
NEVER use the crate as punishment for misbehavior.

A Word about Whining:

If your puppy whines and cries while in the crate, it may be difficult at first to decipher whether he or she is whining to get out or to go outside to eliminate. If you have properly followed the training procedure, you will not have reinforced whining by letting your puppy out of the crate. Initially, you can ignore the whining. Your puppy may stop whining if he or she is just testing you. If you feel your puppy needs to go outside to eliminate, quietly take him or her directly outside, allow the puppy to eliminate, offer brief praise for eliminating properly, then put him or her directly back into the crate. This is no time for play. Throughout the process of ignoring your puppy's whines, expect it to get worse before it gets better. If you react in ANY way (pounding on the crate, yelling, talking, trying to soothe you puppy, etc) you will reinforce this behavior. *Any attention (even negative attention) teaches your puppy that whining louder and longer is the key to getting attention.* Don't give in!! If the process becomes unmanageable, you may need to start the crate training process all over again.



Does Crate Training *Always* Work?

No! Although most pet owners can successfully crate train, certain pets cannot adapt to this type of confinement. This may be especially true of an older adopted puppy. A dog with an unknown background, one who may have suffered a traumatic experience in a crate, or an older dog may not be as likely to accept the crate. Most pet owners can successfully perform crate training. A dog who is frantic, anxious, or totally miserable in a crate should not be forced to use one. It is inhumane, and may lead to physical injury if the puppy attempts to find a way out.
Questions? Let us help you! Call Charlotte Street Animal Hospital at 828-232-0440 or Kim Brophay, Certified Dog Behavior Consultant, at 828-656-8305.