

Pawsitive Results Critter Academy

Where people learn to lead...and pets love to follow!

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Crate Training

Conditioning your dog to feel safe and comfortable in a crate can prove valuable in many situations. Crating a puppy or new dog prevents mistakes such as chewing shoes, tearing up furniture, or peeing on the carpet when you aren't able to supervise. It also gives your dog a safe place to go when he wants to be alone. Everyone deserves a little personal space! A crate gives your dog a clear way to communicate his need for quiet time, which is especially important if there are children in the home. Traveling in a crate is safer than having your dog loose in the car, and crate trained dogs are also welcome in more places. Finally, most pets will have to spend time at the veterinarian at some time in their lives, and if your dog is crate trained he won't be as stressed by his small accommodations.

Most dogs can be successfully crate trained regardless of their age and experience. It can take a couple of days, several weeks, or even longer to crate train a dog. The time commitment depends on many factors, including how much time you devote to practicing each day, your ability to work in small and manageable steps, and your dog's personality. The sooner you start and the more you practice, the sooner the process will be complete. If you run into any snags while working through the steps below, please call me for assistance.

- ◆ **Your dog should be able to comfortably stand up, turn around and lie down** in the crate you select. If you are working on housetraining, the crate should not be any larger than this. If you want to get a crate that will fit your pup as an adult, just block off the back and expand the space as he grows.
- ◆ **Set the crate up in a main living area** of your home. Dogs are much more comfortable being crated in areas where they spend time with their family. Even if no one is home, your dog will feel less isolated if he is in a familiar place.
- ◆ **Teach your dog that going into the crate is rewarding.** Tie the door open and practice having your dog go into the crate for small yummy treats. Do not put any pressure on your dog; just toss a treat in and wait for him to go into the crate on his own. You can even start by tossing the treats just inside the door so he only has to put his head in to reach it. If you act like this is no big deal, your dog will relax and enjoy the game. If you expend a lot of energy encouraging your dog to go in, he'll probably get worried and become more resistant.

- ◆ **Begin closing the crate door for 1-2 seconds** once your dog is going into the crate happily. It can take as little as a few practice sessions the first day to reach this point.
- ◆ **Slowly increase the amount of time you leave the door closed**, always using your dog's comfort level as your guide. Sit next to your dog's crate while you read or watch TV. Whenever he is shut in the crate, continue your activity but quietly feed him treats through the door. When you let him out, ignore him and don't give him any treats. Teach him that the good stuff comes when you're in your crate!
- ◆ **Give your dog a food-stuffed toy (such as a Kong) or a favorite chew** instead of feeding treats through the door as you increase his time in the crate. Make this a special goodie that he only gets when crated. Keep crating sessions short enough that you are letting him out before he finishes his special treat. When you let him out, put the goodie away. This gives your dog a reason to look forward to being crated.
- ◆ **If you are crating your dog at night, place it next to your bed** until your dog is consistently sleeping through the night. Then you can gradually move the crate if you want to keep it in a different location. However, dogs feel most secure when sleeping with their pack (you!).
- ◆ **Begin practicing "virtual absences" while your dog is crated.** Place him in the crate with his special goodie and casually leave the room for brief periods of time. Gradually increase the amount of time you spend out of the room as long as your dog remains relaxed.
- ◆ **Now you are ready to leave the house for short periods.** Make sure your dog is well-exercised before you leave and provide a really special goodie that will keep him busy. The first several times, limit your absence to 30 minutes or less. If your dog shows signs of being anxious (vocalizing, drooling, not eating his goodie) during these short absences but is comfortable being crated while you are home, please call me for assistance- your dog may be suffering from separation anxiety. This problem generally gets worse unless specifically addressed.
- ◆ **Gradually increase your absences up to a maximum of 4 hours at a time.** If you are working on housetraining, crating must be limited to less than the maximum time your puppy can wait between potty breaks. Always base your decision to increase the time on your dog's comfort level.