



Crate Training

I highly recommend crate training for all dogs and puppies. It might look like a cage to you and I, but I urge you to think from your dog's perspective.

The large majority of dogs love their crates. The crate is their safe and cosy haven. [Anxious or fearful](#) dogs can seek refuge in times of stress. Dogs in busy family homes can escape for a little down-time and a place to sleep undisturbed. The crate provides familiar comfort during times of new or unusual experiences such as car or aeroplane travel or when staying away from home.

A secured crate is the safest way for dogs to travel in vehicles. Dogs must be contained in a crate to travel on aircraft in Australia.

A crate trained dog can be included in more family activities.

Crate training assists the development of independence and resilience, an ability to cope with the world, particularly when he cannot be with you, which may provide some protection against the development of [anxieties](#) and their related behavioural problems.

Crate training is a necessity for assistance and companion dogs in order to meet compliance for hospital visits, etc. For these organisations, crate training is compulsory. These dogs may find themselves in various unusual situations and the crate will provide familiar comfort.

Not all dogs will find comfort in a crate. Please ensure that your dog is introduced and gradually conditioned to enjoy time in the crate. Always look for signs of discomfort in your dog's body language and behaviour. Stress signals include: yawning, licking lips/nose, inability to settle, taking food treats more roughly than usual, whining, barking, ears pulled back, widened eyes, hunched body posture. If you are seeing these signals, you will need to take a backward step and move forward only at a pace comfortable for your individual dog.

Some dogs will never become comfortable in a crate. That's okay; crate training is not compulsory!



Size Matters

We do not want the dog to be cramped in his crate. We want the dog to be able to stand up and turn around. However, the crate will lose its "safe-haven" or "den" feeling if it is too big. Take the dog with you to the pet shop to make the purchase. Stand the dog beside the crate at the shop for measurement purposes. Do *not* attempt to get him into the crate at the shop if he is not yet used to a crate.

If buying for a puppy, you might need to estimate his adult size and buy appropriately. You can reduce the size of the crate for now by securing a cardboard box in the back of the crate. This is particularly important if you are using the crate to assist with toilet training. If the crate is too big, the puppy will simply toilet at the back of the crate and sleep at the front away from his mess. The right sized crate will encourage the puppy to keep his sleeping quarters clean.

Positioning the Crate at Home

Position the crate in a social area of the home out of the thoroughfare. Locating the crate in a position where you have seen the dog or puppy relax previously, will be beneficial. Place some familiar comfy bedding inside and leave the door open.

If you have chosen a wire crate, you might like to consider covering it with a towel or sheet to provide the “cosy-haven” or “den” feeling.

New Puppy and Crate Training

If you're lucky enough to have purchased a puppy from a breeder or foster carer who has already taught the puppies to love their crates, you've got a great head-start.

Either way, I recommend having your new puppy sleep overnight in a crate right beside your bed. Your new puppy is likely to be experiencing a degree of distress, having just left his Mum and litter and his first home. You'll be able to drop your hand to the crate door and talk to him during the night when he distress vocalises. I particularly like the crates that have a door in the roof, for this purpose. You might not be able to completely console him, but at least you're there for him, going through this difficult time with him. You'll also be more likely to wake when he does, for a toilet break.

**Puppies fed a species-appropriate raw diet will be able to “hold-on”
overnight sooner than dry-kibble fed puppies**

Even if the puppy hasn't been previously conditioned to the crate, he has to be contained somehow overnight while you sleep and can't supervise him. I think the crate beside your bed is the best option. Trying to shut him in the laundry or bathroom is probably going to be highly distressing for him (and you, trying to sleep through the howling). Allowing him to snuggle with you in bed is going to make it really tough for him to learn to cope with the world when you're not around for him. It potentially contributes to the development of separation-related-anxiety.

After three to seven nights of sleeping beside your bed, your puppy will have become accustomed to this arrangement. Now, to further develop his ability to cope with the world around him, start moving the crate away from directly beside you:

- One night, move it towards the foot of your bed.
- The next night move it to closer to your bedroom door.
- The following night move it to outside your open bedroom door.

- Then move it around the corner of your open bedroom door.
- Now close your bedroom door.
- Now move it along the hallway outside your bedroom.
- Finally, vary the location of the crate all over the house and yard (if the climate is not cold or wet), garage, etc.

If you would eventually like your puppy/dog to sleep in your bedroom or on your bed, it's okay to allow it as an occasional (once a week) treat whilst he's a puppy. Once your dog is an adult, I still recommend insisting he sleep away from you one night a fortnight or month to maintain his ability to do so. We know he'd prefer to sleep in your bedroom, but he can also cope if he has to sleep elsewhere.

Crate Training Procedures

Ensure the dog is ready for learning. He's recently had a toilet break and a drink. It's been at least three hours since his last meal. He is relaxed in the training environment. There are no competing distractions.

Seat yourself two to three metres for small dogs, further for larger dogs, away from the crate with a supply of your dog's favourite training treats (and your clicker if using one).

Look for the dog showing any interest in the crate, even if he is just looking in the direction of the crate from a distance; say "good" (or "yes" or use a clicker) and then immediately toss a food treat in a direction that will have the dog move away from the crate to retrieve it. Once he has retrieved and eaten his food treat, he will be likely to move towards the crate again. Once more you will mark, "good" and then immediately throw a treat away from the crate.

Repeat this process, gradually having the dog move closer to the crate before you mark "good" and toss the treat. Before you know it, the dog will be stepping into the crate and then fully entering the crate. You will "good" and toss the food outside the crate so that the dog has to come out of the crate to retrieve the treat. He will return to the crate in order to prompt the next "good" and treat.

Now you can start delaying the “good” and treat - initially, wait just two seconds being in the crate and then gradually increase but keep the duration varied as to when you will “good” and treat.

Training sessions should be short and highly successful. Three to five minutes is plenty for dogs that are inexperienced in training procedures. For dogs that have participated in other training scenarios previously, ten minutes is suitable. Ensure the dog relaxes, preferably sleeping, between training sessions to absorb the new learning.

Introduce a cue to send the dog into the crate. When the dog has swallowed the previous treat, say your cue word such as “bed” or “crate”. Your aim is to have the cue word precede the dog’s action of running into his crate. As usual you will “good” and treat on correct performance.

Once your dog is confidently and consistently going into the crate, you can now treat him inside the crate so that he doesn’t have to run out to retrieve the treat. The longer he remains in the crate, the more treats he will receive.

Start closing the door. You could use a food-filled toy or a raw, meaty bone to enhance your dog’s feelings about being confined in a crate. Cue the dog to enter the crate, give him the goodie and then close the door. Stay with him. After a few minutes, open the door and encourage the dog to come out. Take the toy or bone away.

Being in the crate is good because he has access to his toy/bone. Send him back to his crate and give him his toy/bone once inside again. Repeat the process occasionally throughout the time it takes to finish the toy/bone.



If your dog or puppy is not comfortably allowing you to take his toy/bone, please contact your professional qualified dog trainer immediately for appropriate advice on resource guarding. Under no circumstances, should you attempt to reprimand or punish a dog or puppy for guarding, even if he is displaying aggression. Avoid the situation until the issue is resolved.

Leaving the Dog Alone in a Crate

He's not ready for you to leave him alone yet! Take it slowly!

If we have built a pleasant and relaxed association in the dog's mind to being confined in the crate, we are now ready to begin the desensitisation process of leaving him alone in the crate.

If at any time during this procedure, the dog goes into a panic, it is imperative that the current level is ceased and the handler returns to the close vicinity of the dog in the crate without actually releasing the dog from the crate. You could use your happy, confident voice to allay the dog's fears: "Sorry Mate, too much, too soon? My mistake. Just relax; I'm back."

The desensitisation process for crate training will follow a similar progression as for the Tie-up or Restraint Exercise, where the dog or puppy is desensitised to being restrained by lead and then left alone (see separate document).

Initially, stay with the dog in the crate. When he is showing that he is comfortable, proceed to moving around the room. Look out for any signs that the dog is no longer completely comfortable ie licking his lips/nose, yawning, panting or becoming unsettled. These signs are early indicators of stress; you might need to slow down a little.

Throughout the desensitisation process, we aim to induce mild levels of stress only. Repeated exposures to a *mild* stress-inducing situation will eventually result in that situation no longer inducing *any* level of stress. The dog's threshold for dealing with this previously stressful situation has been raised. It will now take a higher intensity of this situation to induce a *mild* level of stress.

So... let's subject the dog to a slightly more intense situation. Move further away from the crate and keep your back to the dog. Repeat this level until it also no longer induces *any* level of stress. Now let's try leaving the room... for half a second. Just as you disappear out of sight around the doorframe, reappear immediately. Repeat this process a dozen times, randomly, until it also no longer induces any level of stress. Now you can start to hesitate for the count of two, before

reappearing. As you build up the length of time you are out of sight, ensure you randomise the duration before returning.

For Breeders and Puppy Foster Carers: Crate Training a Litter of Puppies

Dog breeders and foster carers who condition their litters to enjoy being in a crate, give the new owner and the puppy a huge head-start, reducing the level of trauma experienced when leaving their first home, to go to their life-long families. In turn this reduces the risk of developing various behavioural problems.

Place several puppy-size crates in the playpen/yard area, with the doors open for the puppies to come and go. At this point, the puppies are simply becoming familiar with the crates in their familiar environment. They will want to explore them and will find them comfortable for sleeping.

The puppies will grow to love being closed in the crate if they have experienced being able to have a raw, meaty bone to themselves, whilst their siblings are locked out. One puppy at a time shut in the crate with something highly valuable he can keep for himself!!

Puppies will need regular toilet breaks. Remember that the crate is a great tool in toilet training endeavours because of the canine's natural propensity to be clean. This will be over-ridden if the puppy is forced to toilet in the crate. If a puppy suddenly starts to vocalise whilst confined in the crate, there is a good chance he needs to toilet. Let him out!

Also...

- Ensure the dog is not spending excessive time in the crate. Even if he is enjoying stimulating toys and activities in his crate, he needs to spend time exploring his world outside the crate.
- Being confined in a crate and unable to follow a particular person around or engage in an obsessive pursuit, can be a means of assisting sleep-deprived dogs gain much needed deep (REM) sleep.

- The crate can be used as a “time-out” punishment for undesired behaviour. I have never found that the dog then develops a negative association to the crate. I believe the punishment aspect is the loss of whatever the dog was enjoying through his inappropriate behaviour. It could simply be the loss of freedom or loss of social contact.
- Time-out punishments should be short; the dog will have forgotten why he is in the crate after only five or ten seconds. Release the dog back to the scenario and teach him what you would like him to do instead of the undesired behaviour. If he returns to the undesired behaviour, immediately return him to the crate.
- Crate training is a great tool for developing independence in a dog or puppy. Development of independence allows the dog to feel safe and comfortable when left alone. Particularly in puppies, independence development provides some protection against developing separation anxiety. Also see separate document titled, “The Tie-up or Restraint Exercise”, for further help in this area.
- A crate can provide relief and a sanctuary from children or other stressors in the dog or puppy’s home environment. Ensure that children are taught that the dog or puppy is not to be disturbed or pursued when he chooses to be in his crate. He needs some quiet time.

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