



Acclimating a Dog/Puppy to a Crate

It is very important that the dog's initial experiences with a crate be pleasant. Allow the dog to explore the crate. Toss toys and tidbits inside to encourage the dog to enter. When the dog will enter and exit the crate willingly, without reluctance, close the door for a few seconds or a minute and remain sitting close to the crate. Don't try to push this first confinement period to see how long the dog will tolerate it. Let the dog out and calmly ignore him. Release from confinement should not result in a "big deal", as this will make it more likely the dog will view being in the crate as less pleasant compared to being out of it. Take a break for a few minutes, and repeat the exercise again. Slowly increase the time the dog is in the crate with the door shut. You may want to work up to practicing when the family is eating dinner. Crating the pup during your dinner time prevents pestering and prevents the pup from getting into things because nobody is supervising him. Getting to this point may take several days.

Nighttime Crating. In the meantime, the pup can begin sleeping in the crate at night. It is **crucial** that the crate be located near or preferably in the bedroom so someone can hear him when he cries to be let outside. While some 8 to 10 week pups can sleep through the night, most cannot. The whole purpose of crate training will be defeated if the pup is not let out of the crate when she needs to eliminate. Even adult dogs should be crated close to the family in order to prevent crating from being perceived as social isolation. Some adult dogs who have no previous experience with a crate may become agitated and fearful if crated for too long. Being able to observe the dog while he is crated overnight will prevent the dog from being trapped in the crate and becoming increasingly upset.

Crating When Alone. Once the dog is comfortably sleeping in the crate at night, she can be left alone during the day for short time periods while crated. The first few absences should be less than 30 minutes. It's not a bad idea to leave a tape recorder on at first so you will know if your dog is howling or barking. This behavior is a sign of fear or anxiety, and means that your dog is not calm in the crate. Perhaps you tried to do too much too soon, or maybe the dog had a previous bad experience in the crate. Try crating for shorter time periods. If your dog soils while crated, the answer is not to get a smaller crate. When dogs soil their crate it is usually a sign of anxiety, and the reason for this needs to be examined and steps taken to help the dog be more relaxed while crated. In some cases, the crate may not be appropriate (see below).

If things go well, gradually increase the duration you are gone, but intersperse brief absences with longer ones. Continue to crate your dog for a few minutes each day when you are home, so that crating does not always predict that you are leaving. You

can leave your dog with a chewie or interactive toy (such as a Goodie Ship) when she is crated while alone.

Appropriate Limits For How Long And When A Dog Should Be Crated

Dogs should never be left crated for longer than they can control their bladder or bowels. For young puppies, this may mean no more than a few hours at a time. Geriatric dogs also need to eliminate more frequently than they did as young adults. Many, but not all, young mature dogs may be able to be crated for an entire work day without a break. It is preferable however to give them a break if at all possible.

Dogs Still Need Exercise and Social Time. Young dogs especially need a lot of time for play, exercise and time with you. After being crated all day, they are ready to rock and roll when you arrive home from work, tired and wanting to relax. This is part of owning a dog!! If you aren't willing to spend time playing with your dog or taking her for a walk, then you might want to reconsider whether a dog fits with your lifestyle. Don't allow yourself to get into the following trap:

Your dog, after being crated all day, is rambunctious and unruly when you arrive home. You find this annoying, and put her back in the crate. You try releasing her a little later, and she is even worse than before because she is even more in need of exercise and play time.

Situations In Which A Crate Is Not Appropriate

Dogs who display signs of separation anxiety almost always become worse the more they are confined. Manifestations of separation anxiety are:

- ❑ housesoiling, destructiveness or vocalizing within the first 30 minutes after your departure
- ❑ undesirable behaviors that occur *consistently* when the dog is alone and occur *only* when the dog is alone. Thus, the dog who steals food from the counter, gets in the trash, or tears up a book every now and then is probably not a separation anxiety problem
- ❑ destructive behavior that is often directed at window coverings, door and window moldings, floor coverings in front of doors, or items with the owner's scent such as personal belongings, the TV remote or the couch cushions
- ❑ following the owner from room to room, not wanting to be left in a room alone
- ❑ frantic greetings upon the owner's return.

If your dog doesn't seem to have a problem with separation anxiety, but does not tolerate crating, it may be due to other types of fears or anxieties. Dogs who have noise phobias, such as fear of thunder, often become very frantic if home alone in a crate when a storm occurs. Signs that your dog has not been calm while crate include:

- ❑ damage to the crate from escape attempts
- ❑ damage to surrounding objects, that the dog has been able to reach through the bars of a wire crate
- ❑ wet chest fur from drooling or salivating
- ❑ urination or defecation in the crate
- ❑ the dog moving the crating from one location to another

- excessive barking or howling recorded on audiotape

How And When To Help The Dog Make The Transition From Less Confinement To More Freedom In The House

It's very hard to give a general "rule of thumb" as to when a dog is ready for more freedom. Certainly, she must be well housetrained, and eliminating consistently outside (unless of course when she is ill). Some dogs remain destructive when alone until they are 2 years of age, others can be trusted at a year or less.

Start with very brief absences with the dog free in the house. With very little preparation, walk out the door and be gone for perhaps long enough to pick up your mail or a quart of milk from the store. Be sure to "dog-proof" the house before you leave – don't leave any particularly enticing items within easy reach. You may also want to "booby-trap" things like the trash with something like a "Snappy Trainer". Another option is to close doors of certain rooms or set up some baby gates. If your 5 minute absence results in any misbehavior, try a briefer absence. If, after several attempts, you come home to "messes", perhaps your dog is not yet mature enough to be left alone loose in the house. It's also possible that your dog may be displaying separation anxiety behavior which crating is only masking. A consultation with a qualified behavior consultant may be necessary to help you sort things out. However, if your brief absences are successful, gradually lengthen them. Avoid pushing your luck – don't jump from your dog being well behaved for an hour to attempting to leave her free for an 8 hour work day! Continue working up to longer absences on a gradual basis.

*Patronek, G.J., Glickman, L.T., Beck, A. M., McCabe, G.P. and C. Ecker, 1996. Risk factors for relinquishment of dogs to an animal shelter. JAVMA 209: 572-581.