



Crate training is a practical way to ensure that your dog is safely contained while traveling or when they cannot be properly supervised. It can also be helpful when house training. Additionally, it helps prepare your dog for veterinary visits, if they need to be monitored overnight for medical purposes. By closely following some simple steps, you can teach your dog to enjoy their crate!

Selecting a Crate

Your dog's crate should be large enough for them to comfortably stand up and turn around in. If you are crate training a puppy, select a crate that will accommodate their size when fully grown. You may choose to use either a plastic or collapsible wire crate. Ensure that you remove your dog's collar and/or harness when in the crate, to prevent it from getting caught and potentially injuring your dog.

Training Process

Crate training involves a series of steps. Progressing too quickly may cause your dog to avoid the crate. Always associate the crate with something positive, such as treats or toys! Consider your dog's age, temperament, and past experiences. If your dog has previously had a negative experience in a crate, you may have to spend more time counter-conditioning – changing your dog's emotional response to the crate through positive reinforcement.

Before your dog enters the crate, ensure that you have made it a comfortable space. Adding blankets or towels can provide warmth and comfort. However, avoid blankets if your dog tends to chew bedding material.

Step 1: Introducing Your Dog to the Crate

- Place a small bed or blanket inside the crate, then place the crate in a room that is frequented often by family members, such as the living room. If the movement or presence of the crate door startles your dog, secure the door, or remove it temporarily.
- Allow your dog to approach and investigate the crate, rewarding your dog with treats for efforts such as looking at, sniffing, and attempting to touch or enter the crate. Do NOT force your dog into the crate. Instead, encourage your dog to enter on their own accord by tossing treats inside or a favourite toy. When your dog fully enters the crate on their own, reward your dog with several treats in quick succession!
- If your dog stays in the crate willingly, reward every few seconds while they are in the crate. Always allow your dog access to the crate, and praise and reward your dog if they enter the crate on their own. Do not attempt to close the door at this point.
- Eventually, you can start to introduce a cue. Toss a treat into the crate. As your dog enters the crate, give your verbal cue, such as "kennel" or "crate." Repeat this anytime you put treats in your dog's crate.

Step 2: Feed Your Dog Meals in the Crate

- At mealtimes, place your dog's food bowl in the crate. If your dog is fully entering the crate on their own, place the bowl near the back of the crate. If your dog is hesitant, place the bowl according to your dog's comfort level, then move the bowl increasingly farther into the kennel each meal.
- If your dog is not motivated to stay (or enter) the crate by their dog food, try enticing your dog into the crate by using a higher-value reward, such as a KONG® toy filled with frozen nut butter and/or treats. This will keep your dog occupied and they will associate the crate with a positive experience.

Step 3: Condition Your Dog to Spend Longer Time Periods in the Crate

- Give your verbal cue, and when your dog enters the kennel, reward with a treat.
- Close the door and feed your dog treats through the door for 1-2 minutes, then open the door. Repeat this step several times.
- If your dog consistently remains calm with you standing near the crate, try walking a few steps away. Periodically give your dog treats through the crate door as you walk away or around the room. After a few minutes, open the door. If your dog starts to paw the crate door or bark, do not open the door until they have stopped these behaviours.
- Eventually progress to leaving the room and returning several seconds later. If your dog remains calm in their crate, reward your dog by feeding a treat through the crate door, then open the door.

Repeat this process several times a day, if possible. Your dog will become more comfortable with their kennel with repeated, short, and positive training sessions. If your dog begins to whine or bark during this process, this is an indication that you have progressed too quickly.

Step 4: Crating Your Dog When Unsupervised

Before attempting to leave your dog crated when you leave home, your dog should NOT show signs of anxiety or stress if you leave the room. Your dog should be comfortable with being in their crate alone for at least 30 minutes before you practice departing from your home.

- Use your crate cue and leave a toy and/or treats (i.e. KONG® toy with frozen nut butter and/or treats) to keep your dog occupied and reinforce the crate as being a positive space.
- Depart the house quietly and promptly, as you want to keep departures and arrivals calm to avoid anxiety. Begin with short trips away from the home (start with a few minutes) and gradually increase the amount of time your dog is left home in the crate.
- Ideally, your dog should not be crated for more than 4 hours at a time, except overnight.

Reducing Stress

- Play calming music when you depart the home (i.e. classical music) as this has been demonstrated to have a relaxing effect on dogs.
- Try draping a blanket or towel over your dog's kennel. Reducing light in the crate can help encourage sleep.
- Use calming pheromone products, such as Adaptil® to reduce stress.

Did You Know?

Adaptil® products are available for purchase at Bingo's Pet Shop at the Edmonton Humane Society! All sales proceeds go directly back to the Edmonton Humane Society to help the animals in our care.

Crating Your Dog Overnight

Initially, it may help to put your dog's crate in your bedroom, especially if you have a puppy. A puppy will need to eliminate during the night, every few hours. If your puppy starts to whine overnight in the crate, take your puppy outside. Avoid playing with your puppy when you take them out. Bathroom breaks should be purposeful, to avoid your puppy learning that whining = attention. For adult dogs, keeping the crate in close distance will prevent your dog from associating the crate with social isolation.

Once your dog comfortably sleeps in their crate overnight, you can begin to gradually move the crate out of your bedroom, if you prefer. However, there is nothing wrong with keeping the dog's crate in your bedroom.

Troubleshooting

- If your dog becomes anxious within the crate and shows signs of escape or panic (i.e. pawing, scratching, barking, howling, drooling) you have progressed too quickly. Revisit earlier training steps, such as rewarding your dog for entering the crate to prevent your dog from regressing and/or injuring themselves.
- Try using a petcam or other video device to monitor your dog's behaviour when you are gone. Observe for any signs of anxiety, which might indicate that shorter periods alone are required.
- Do not hesitate to seek advice from a certified dog trainer or veterinarian if you have concerns, especially if your dog has previously had a negative experience within a crate.
- Ensure your dog receives sufficient mental and physical exercise before being crated.

What to AVOID

Here are some things to avoid when crate training:

- Using the crate as a form of punishment. Your dog will associate the crate with negative experiences and will be reluctant to enter.
- Crating your dog for long periods. Make alternative arrangements for your dog if you need to be away from the house for a long period, such as a pet sitter or a dog daycare facility.
- Rushing crate training. If your dog is anxious or fearful in the crate, make arrangements (i.e. dog daycare) until your dog is trained to be comfortably crated.
- Crating puppies without bathroom breaks. Very young puppies (i.e. 9-10 weeks) may need to eliminate every 30 minutes to an hour.

Additional Resources:

The Training Academy at the Edmonton Humane Society offers private consultations for canine behavioural issues. One of our certified dog trainers can help you with crate training.

For more information, visit our website: <https://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com/what-we-do/education-training/dog-training/private-consultations/>

Did You Know?

You can also ask us behaviour questions by emailing:

askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com

It takes approximately \$7 million to keep the Edmonton Humane Society operational for one year and 40% of these funds come from generous donations made by supporters like you. Please Donate.