



Middlesex Veterinary Center
31 Stevens Street
Littleton MA 01460



CRATE TRAINING A PUPPY

One of the first things an owner teaches a newly acquired puppy is not to eliminate inside the house. There are many ways methods to achieve this, and most are successful-eventually. But most breeders will agree that the best method by far for housetraining a puppy is using a crate. Breeders and trainers long have known the benefits of crates but new pet owners may not be as well informed.

Many owners who have never used a crate think that keeping a puppy in a “cage” is cruel, but the truth is that when the crate is used correctly, the dog learns to look upon the crate as his own place. Since the dog likes to sleep in a den-like setting, he will seek out the crate when he wishes to rest undisturbed.

It takes time, consistency, and common sense to crate train a puppy properly, but eventually, one who has been properly crate trained will not mind being crated when the family goes out and cannot take him along. The owner can relax and enjoy peace of mind knowing that the dog, is quite comfortable and is not destroying the house.

The reason for the crate’s success in housetraining a pup is equally simple. If a pup can possibly help it, he will not soil his sleeping area. Even though a crate is very useful as an aid in housetraining a pup, don’t expect miracles. An eight-week old puppy just cannot control that active bladder yet and he doesn’t know what is expected of him. The best approach for this age is to ignore the mistakes for now, and praise him for going in the right place. Use the crate when you can’t watch the puppy but don’t overuse it. A puppy needs to play but if he is constantly crated he will fast become a wild and unruly pup that his owner cannot hope to keep up with. Make sure that he gets time out of the crate to exercise.

Step One in Training

Assemble the crate and put it in a location close to other family members such as in the bedroom at night, because the pup prefers to be close to his owners, so the effects of separation (crying, howling, etc.) are lessened.

Then it's easy enough to move the crate to the kitchen or family room during the day so he still can feel a part of his family.

Before you put the pup in the crate, remove his collar to prevent its entanglement in the crate and because tiny legs can also get caught in it. When you first put the puppy in the crate, he will bark, whine, or cry unless his breeder has already crate trained him. But just put him in, offer him a treat and close the door. Leave the room but remain just outside in order to audit the puppy's behavior. At the first sign of a separation response such as barking, whining, or howling, intervene with a sharp, "No!" The pup should associate the starting voice with his actions and stop. The puppy will usually settle down after four or five attempts at emotional responses.

Once he is quiet, keep him in the crate for 30 to 45 minutes. After that time, if he starts crying take him outside so he can relieve himself and after he has accomplished that, praise him, take him back into the house and allow him free time out of the crate. If he starts chewing something other than one of his toys, respond with a sharp "No!" and take it from him, replacing it with a toy.

After 15 to 20 minutes of free time to romp and play, put him back in the crate for a nap. If he cries, repeat the procedure of correcting him with a sharply raised voice. Because he is learning through association, consistency should help him accept being in the crate after only a few tries. When he has been quiet in the crate for an hour or so, repeat the steps of taking him out, praising him, and then taking him out for free time.

Be advised, too, that a pup will have to eliminate after eating or playing. Also a very young puppy will not be able to hold his urine all night, so be prepared to be awakened during the night to take him out. As terrible as walking a dog at four a.m. sounds, it's preferable to allowing him to soil his crate.

Take the puppy on lead outside immediately after letting him out of the crate. Rush him to the door or carry him if he is small so he can avoid an accident, and be sure he does relieve himself.

With the possible exceptions of the first few nights of confinement, the pup usually will not soil his bed. Never place newspapers on the bottom of his crate. These will only encourage him to soil his crate. After you are sure that he isn't wetting his bed, you may give him a blanket or towel, but he may be more comfortable without one.

Gradually lengthen the amount of time that he is allowed to play, but don't give him more time than he can handle without having an accident. By the time he is five or six months old, he should be able to control himself for an hour or so between trips outside. It's important not to encourage the pup to cry by taking him out every time he makes a fuss. However, neither do you want to encourage him to coil his crate, so use common sense here. If he has relieved himself and doesn't need a drink, correct him for crying and make him stay in the crate.

Structured Learning

The crate is also useful as an aid in curbing destructive behavior. If you use a crate while training a puppy, you won't have to worry about uncontrolled chewing. Many owners have returned home to find furniture shredded and floors and walls chewed. If a puppy chews when you leave the house, crate train him so you can leave him for a few hours with peace of mind. As he matures and proves himself capable of being loose in the home without destroying it, give him that privilege. But don't give him responsibility that he cannot handle. Obviously, if a puppy can't get to it, he can't chew it. But remember that the crate itself cannot stop the puppy's desire to chew while he is teething, so provide him with safe chewable toys and nylon and rawhide bones. If the dog continues to chew beyond the teething stage, he is probably bored, so spend more time with him.

By the time the pup is eight months (a bit older for giant breeds), he should be able to walk around the house for most of the day as long as he has been taken out to relieve himself. By one year of age, he should be mature enough to be trusted all night in the house, but keep the crate set up with the door open. The dog will be very attached to the "den" by now and will look for it. He can also be crated when you leave the house for a few hours. Keep in mind, however, that the dog is expected not to destroy your house, so return that favor by keeping his crate clean. Respect his privacy in the crate and teach children that if the dog wants attention he will come to them. The crate should be the one spot in the home that belongs to the dog.

Good Things in Small Packages

Crates come in many different styles, types, and sizes. Choosing a crate depends on personal preference, and most kinds will serve the purpose well. The crate should be large enough for an adult dog of your puppy's breed to lie down, stand up and turn around in without difficulty. A crate that is too small will not be comfortable for the dog, and one that is too big may encourage the puppy to soil it.

The fiberglass airline crates are great for shipping a dog by air, and many breeders use them at home. However, avoid airline crates with zinc nuts and bolts, since they're poisonous if swallowed. My preference is the wire crates because they fold up, so they are more portable than those made of fiberglass.

Finally, be careful not to overuse the crate by keeping the dog in it for long periods of time on a regular basis. In addition, it is very important that the dog receives plenty human companionship and exercise when he's not in his crate. After all, the crate is a tool to promote a happier, better-behaved companion for his owner's sake and his own.