



## Basic Crate Training Guide

Crate training refers to the process of teaching your dog to be comfortable with (and enjoy!) spending time in a small confinement area (crate). Crate training is a useful and important tool for dogs who are potty training, dogs who cannot be left free in the house unsupervised, to use as a place where your dog can settle/relax, and for safe transport. With time and patience, dogs can learn to love their crates!

### 1. Choose the right crate.

- Begin crate training as soon as your dog gets home! Purchase a crate that is large enough for the dog to stand up, turn around fully, and lie down in. It should not be much bigger than that – the crate should be an area where your dog can relax, but not much else! We want to prevent the dog from eliminating on one side of the crate and coming back to the other side to lie down. To start, make the crate cozy with a soft blanket or towel.

### 2. Introduce your dog to the crate.

- Begin by tossing some yummy, high-value treats into the crate for your dog to retrieve, and let your dog explore the crate *while the door remains open*.
- If your dog is hesitant to enter the crate, begin by tossing some treats close to the entrance of the crate and work up to tossing treats further and further to the back of the crate for your dog to retrieve.
- If they are comfortable approaching and readily entering the crate, begin to feed your dog their meals towards the back of the crate while the door remains open, then try feeding them their meals while the door remains closed and letting them out once they are done eating.

*If your dog begins whining or expresses discomfort inside the crate, they have been in there for too long! Let them out and keep them in the crate for a shorter period next round.*

### 3. Build Duration.

- Move on to putting a Kong stuffed with something very yummy, a bully stick, or special bone/chewy (something that takes a long time to chew) towards the back of the crate.
- Close the door of the crate while your dog works on the chewy and move about the house normally.
- Let your dog out of the crate when they finish their treat. Depending on the treat, this could take 5 minutes or longer.
- Repeat this step several times, varying the length of your absences from 1 to 20 minutes, monitoring carefully for stress. The key is to ensure you are creating positive experiences with the crate, so staying at a shorter duration to ensure a positive association is preferable to increasing the duration too quickly and causing your dog stress.

#### **4. Begin systematically crating and leaving.**

- Move on to leaving your dog in the crate with something delicious (similar to step 3) while you leave the house for short errands, such as getting the mail or watering the garden.
- *Gradually* build up the average duration of your absences while your dog remains in the crate. For example, crate them for 3 minutes the first time, 5 minutes the next time, then 2 minutes, then 6 minutes, back to 5 minutes the next time, then 10 minutes, then back to 6 minutes, etc. This way, you can begin to *slowly increase the average time* they are left in the crate but can keep the routine less predictable.

*When you plan to crate your dog for longer than an hour, make sure all of their needs are met (they've gone potty, they are exercised/likely ready for a nap) before you crate them!*

#### **5. As you go:**

- Do not use the crate for more than 3-4 hours at a time, except for bedtime. If you need to break up the day while you are at work, try a dog walker or ask a friend or neighbor to come over and give your dog a walk.
- If you need to restrict your dog's access to your home while they are still learning to love the crate, you can restrict their access by using ex-pens or baby gates, or by keeping them in a dog-proofed room while they are unsupervised at home.

#### **6. Get creative with your enrichment!** For a comprehensive guide to enrichment and food puzzles, see our *Constructive Canine Enrichment handout* on our website.