

Crate training and creating the safe space



Crate training can be a very useful tool in your life with your dog, but it must be done for the right reasons and in the right way.

The idea is for the crate to be a 'safe space' for your dog, not a cage to be shut away in for convenience. It is important to select a suitable size crate for your dog. He or she should be able to stand up at full height and comfortably move, turn around, stretch out, and lie fully flat on their side in their crate - this means that in some cases a very large crate will be needed!

Why and when to use a crate

Crates can be useful to provide some quiet time but this is as much about quiet time for your dog as it is for you. Some dogs, and puppies in particular, will continue to play well past being tired and need to rest. Sometimes we need to explain to children that our dogs need rest too. In this situation it can be beneficial to structure in some 'quiet' time.

Young puppies explore everything. This is a normal part of behaviour and development but can be a hazard if you are not able to supervise and have potentially dangerous items and substances around. In this case, a crate with comfortable bedding, some water, your KONG, chews and a few safe toys is advisable whilst you are out. This might be just for a few minutes whilst you pop to the toilet, or for an hour or two whilst shopping.

Golden rules

If used correctly, crates can be a useful piece of equipment. However over-using a crate would be unfair on a dog and could trigger long-term stress, including separation anxiety. The idea is for your dog to enjoy the crate and have a positive association with it, so it becomes a safe space in the home for them. For this reason, there are some golden rules:

- Select a crate of the appropriate size. Your dog should be able to stand, stretch and move around comfortably inside the crate. Bear this in mind if you plan to use the crate into adulthood as they are not cheap and it is easier to invest in the right size from the start.
- Remember that the crate is a positive place for your puppy or dog: it is not an excuse to shut your dog away and **never** use it to punish your dog or puppy.

If you are out a lot, you need to think how you will fit a dog into your busy life. A crate is not the answer for this.

A crate should contain some comfortable bedding, a bowl of water, your filled KONG along with a selection of chews and safe toys and chews to meet their needs. If you are housetraining, at night the crate should have a small area covered with newspaper for the puppy or dog to toilet on if they really need to. This should be as far from the bedding as possible.

- Consider where you will position a crate in your home. They are often bulky but should be placed in a suitable area for your dog - not too hot and not too cold. Avoid draughts, direct sunlight and next to radiators and kitchen appliances. A busy area is not advisable as this is a resting area for your dog, think about noise and other possible distractions.



Starting off

- Set up the crate and safe space before the puppy or dog arrives to live with you.
- Open the door of the crate and kneel down beside it. Call your puppy to you, and show them that you have a treat.
- Throw the treat into the crate and your puppy will follow it in. Give them lots of praise and give them another treat while they are in the crate. Repeat this several times so that your puppy thinks that going in and out of the crate is fun and rewarding.
- You can build up the time your pup spends in the crate over a period of time. For example, feed breakfast and dinner in the crate always, initially with door open so as not to scare your dog. You can also use your rubber KONG filled with food in the crate to build this time up at quieter times of the day.

Getting the family 'on-side'

It is important that everyone in the household understands the purpose of the crate. This can be difficult with children, so it is worth looking at the skills and ideas taken at the workshops to prepare (see handout 'My dog's bedroom' for more detail).

- We recommend creating the idea that the crate is your dog's 'bedroom' to reinforce the idea that it is a place for sleeping and rest, and is your dog's own private area.
- Children could make a sign for the crate, e.g. 'Rover's bedroom - do not disturb'
- Prepare activities that your child(ren) can do linked to your dog, but not directly with the dog, whilst they are in the crate. E.g. Draw a picture of Rover whilst he is chewing/sleeping/etc.
- Never let children climb inside the crate with your dog or puppy. Sometimes setting up a 'den' for your child(ren) to copy the dog safely helps with this.
- Explain that dogs need lots of sleep and that we shouldn't wake them up when they are sleeping.
- Keep putting your dog in the crate and letting them out as jobs for the adults in the household.

Alternatives: baby gates

Depending on your situation and home layout, baby gates can be very useful, and relatively inexpensive pieces of equipment. They can be used in a similar way to a crate if you have a room or area that is safe for the dog to be in unsupervised.



- Control access to areas of the home.
- Control access to areas whilst you are out or unable to supervise your dog.
- Provide a quiet room for your dog to spend time in to rest.
- Provide a space which children understand is designed for the pet dog to be in, undisturbed.
- As a training aid - as described below;

Baby gates can also be used if you have a puppy or dog who jumps up at your child. With your dog on one side and your child on the other, your dog can be taught to sit before being offered a treat by your child. As they are separated by the baby gate your dog is unable to jump on your child, which is unnerving for some. Once it has been established that your dog only gets the treat when sat nicely (or at least with all four paws on the ground), the baby gate can be removed and the lesson carried on.