



CRATE TRAINING/HOUSE TRAINING FOR PUPPIES

Crate Training

A puppy's crate not only prevents behavior problems (chewing, house soiling, destructiveness, digging, escape behavior, garbage raiding, etc.) but also serves as a home or den for the puppy. Crate training is neither cruel nor unfair. On the contrary, leaving the puppy unsupervised to wander, investigate, destroy and perhaps get injured is far more inhumane than confinement. As long as the crate is large enough, the puppy gets sufficient exercise and attention, and not left in the crate too long, the crate is a safe, humane place to confine an unsupervised pet.

A metal, collapsible crate with a tray floor works well, as long as the crate is large enough for the dog to stand, turn, and stretch out. Some dogs feel more secure if a blanket is draped over the crate. A plastic traveling crate or a homemade crate can also be used. Playpens or barricades may also be successful as long as they are indestructible and escape proof.

Because dogs are social animals, an ideal location for the crate is a room where the family spends time such as a kitchen, den, or bedroom rather than an isolated laundry or furnace room. For the crate to remain a positive, enjoyable retreat, the dog should never be placed in the crate for punishment. If time-out is used as punishment, a washroom, laundry room, or basement can be used for social isolation. A radio or television may help to calm the dog when it is alone. A background sound (radio, music, television) can also help mask environmental noises which may stimulate the dog to vocalize (bark or whine).

Introduce the puppy to the crate as soon as it is brought home and as early in the day as possible. The crate should be left open so that the puppy can voluntarily enter the crate for food, water, toys, or shelter. By making all crate experiences pleasant, the puppy should feel secure and comfortable in its crate.

Choose a location outdoors for the puppy to eliminate. A short direct route is best. Take the puppy to the location, wait until the puppy eliminates, and reward the puppy lavishly with praise or food. After some play and exercise, place the puppy in its crate with water, a toy and a treat and close the door.

Leave the room but remain close enough to hear the puppy. It is normal for pups to cry or whine when separated from their "pack". Escape behavior and vocalization are to be expected when a dog is first placed into its crate. If the escape behavior is short or mild, ignore the dog until the crying stops. Never let it out unless it is quiet. This teaches that quiet behavior will be rewarded and that crying cannot make the owner return.

Negative consequences may be necessary if crying does not subside on its own. For negative consequences ("punishment") to be successful, it must be harsh enough to stop the behavior and should be withdrawn as soon as the dog is quiet. A shaker can (a sealed can filled with coins or marbles) can be tossed near the crate when the pup barks. Other types of punishment include water sprayers or loud sounds (alarm, air horn). If possible, the owner should remain out of sight when administering punishment. By plugging in an alarm, tape recorder, water pik, or hair dryer beside the crate and turning it on by using a remote control switch each time the dog barks, the dog can be taught that barking leads to unpleasant consequences whether the owner is present or not. When the barking ceases, the punishment is stopped. Bark collars and alarms that go off automatically each time the dog barks are also available for persistent or difficult problems. Any type of punishment must be used with caution, however, since it can exacerbate the vocalization problem of a very anxious pet.

Place the puppy in its crate a few times before the end of the day. Each time, increase the time that the dog must stay in the crate before letting it out. Give the puppy exercise and a chance to eliminate before securing it in the crate. At bedtime, the dog should be exercised, closed in its crate, and left for the night. Do not go to the dog if it cries. Remote punishment as previously described can be used to deter crying. Alternately,

the crate can be kept in the bedroom. If the pup sleeps in one end of its crate and eliminates in the other, a divider can be installed to keep the puppy in a smaller area. Never leave the puppy in its crate for longer than it can control itself or it may be forced to eliminate in the crate. If the pup must be left for long periods during which it might eliminate, it should be confined to a larger area than the crate (see Paper Training). As the puppy gets older, its control increases and it can be left longer in its crate.

When the puppy is indoors, it must be constantly supervised for any signs of elimination. If the puppy begins to sniff the floor, circle, or squat, it should be taken directly to its elimination spot and rewarded if it eliminates. If the puppy is caught in the act of eliminating indoors, the owners should administer an appropriate punishment (a startling NO or other startling noise) to reduce the chance of the puppy eliminating in that location again. Harsh punishment should be avoided or the pup may be reluctant to eliminate in front of the owner anywhere, even out doors. Never rub the pup's nose in the excrement or hit or spank him or her. Immediately take the puppy out to the proper location, and give a lavish reward if it eliminates. If the puppy eliminates in an inappropriate location and no verbal reprimand is given during elimination, the puppy will likely return to that location to eliminate; the pup must be "caught in the act". Also, scolding the pup even a minute after the accident happens will have no effect as the pup does not understand what he/she has done wrong. Only with constant supervision can the owner catch the puppy in the act every time it eliminates in an inappropriate location.

Although there is a great deal of individual variability, many puppies can control themselves through the night by three months of age. During the daytime, once the puppy has relieved itself, a 2 month-old puppy may have up to three hours of control, a 3 month-old puppy up to four hours, and a 4 month-old puppy up to five hours. Until the puppy is house trained, it should be confined to its crate whenever the owner is unavailable to supervise. Once the puppy has completed four consecutive weeks without soiling anywhere in the house, the owners can begin to decrease supervision, particularly during the first hour when the puppy comes indoors after eliminating.

Be certain to take the puppy outside to its elimination site regularly, particularly when it has just finished playing, eating, napping, before bedtime, or if any pre-elimination signs are seen. Reward the puppy lavishly for using the right area. Teaching the puppy to eliminate in a single location outdoors is far simpler, and much more practical than trying to teach a puppy not to eliminate in thousands of different locations indoors. The puppy can be taught to eliminate on command by repeatedly giving cue words ("Hurry up") in an upbeat tone during the act of elimination. Using a leash indoors to keep the puppy nearby not only aids supervision, but helps the puppy learn to signal the owner when it needs to go outdoors to eliminate. The puppy quickly learns that if it eliminates in front of the owner indoors it will be scolded. If it has to eliminate, but can't sneak away from the owner because of the leash, it is placed in a conflict situation. This results in anxious fidgeting or vocalizing. The pet should then be taken outdoors. Eventually, the pup will learn that if it approaches the owner and fidgets or vocalizes, it will be taken outdoors to eliminate and be rewarded.

PAPER TRAINING

If a puppy must be left alone for longer than it can control elimination, it should be placed in a dog-proof room, pen or barricaded area. The crate can be placed inside the area with the door open. The floor outside the crate should be covered with paper for elimination. Once the puppy chooses a favorite location, the papered area can be made smaller. If the crate is large enough, paper can be placed at the far end until the dog keeps the entire area clean. Paper training should be discontinued as soon as the dog gains sufficient control or it may become a difficult habit to eliminate. It is recommended to use paper training judiciously; one theory to consider is that once a dog eliminates indoors, it may learn it is acceptable to do so indoors. As a result, it may be more difficult to "break" the pup of eliminating indoors.

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