



Crate Training Guide

Dog crates are widely available and can be used to provide a safe haven area where your dog can feel safe and secure. They can also be used as a training aid to help puppies to learn to be left alone or with toilet training. Crates can also be a useful tool for ensuring your dog is secure and comfortable during transport.



Safe haven not 'sin bin'

Your dog's crate should be a place where he/she feels secure, safe and comfortable. Crates must never be used as a punishment or to prevent unwanted behaviours such as destruction of furniture. If you are concerned about your dog or puppy's behaviour you should contact your vet who will be able to refer you to a clinical animal behaviourist if necessary.



Get ready to start training

Choosing the right crate

The right dimensions of the crate will depend on the size of your dog. As a minimum your dog must be able to sit and stand at full height, turn around, stretch out and lie down in a natural position.

Remember if you are buying a crate for a puppy think about the size of crate they will need when they are fully grown. If your puppy is a cross breed it can be more difficult to predict their adult size - you may have to replace your crate if your puppy outgrows it.



The materials of the crate must be safe for your dog and it should allow for sufficient air to flow through it.

Creating a safe haven

The following will help you turn the crate into a safe haven where your dog or puppy can feel secure:

- Add some comfortable soft bedding for your dog to lie on
- Place some interesting, safe, chew toys inside
- Find a location for the crate which is not in direct sunlight or in a draught
- Placing a cover over part of the crate can help nervous





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dogs feel more secure

- You can make sure they have access to water by using a clip-on bowl to prevent them from tipping it over

The Crate Training Process

When it comes to the crate training process there are two important points to remember:

- ★ **Think positive** - the crate should be always be associated with something pleasant.
- ★ **Be patient** - training should take place in a series of small steps. Don't go too fast.

With your crate kitted out with comfy bedding and interesting chew toys you are ready to start the training process...

Step One - introduction to the crate

Step one is about introducing your dog to the crate and getting them familiar and comfortable with their new safe haven.

At this stage it's a good idea to place the crate in an area of the house where the family spends a lot of time and to fix the door of the crate open, so that it cannot swing shut and frightened your dog or puppy.

Start by placing some treats or a chew inside the crate and allowing your dog to explore at their own leisure. If your dog doesn't start exploring of their own accord you can help entice them by calling them over to the crate in a happy tone of voice or by throwing tasty treats near to the crate at first and then moving them progressively closer until you are throwing treats inside of the crate. If your dog is not motivated by food try the same process with their favourite toy.

Once your dog or puppy is taking treats from inside the crate continue throwing treats inside until they are happy to calmly walk all the way inside the crate to get the treats.

- ★ Remember to be patient. This might take several minutes or several days. Keep session short (about 3 minutes).



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Step Two - slowly increasing the time spent in the crate

A good way to start increasing the length of time your dog or puppy is happy to stay in the crate is by feeding them their meals in the crate.

Place their food bowl at the back of the crate and if your dog or puppy enters happily and starts eating you can close the door. However if your dog or puppy shows any signs of reluctance to enter or eat in the crate start by placing the food bowl outside the crate and through several sessions progressively move the bowl inside the crate and then towards the back of the crate.

The first time you close the door while they are eating, open it as soon as they are finished. With each successive feeding, leave the door closed a few minutes longer, until they are staying in the crate for ten minutes or so after eating.

If your dog whines to be let out or shows any signs of distress including panting, excessive barking, cowering or aggression you may have increased the length of time too quickly. Go back a few steps and allow the dog to eat in the crate with the door open. From there move slowly and gradually in short sessions until your dog is comfortable staying in the crate for ten minutes or so after eating.

- ★ Once step two is successfully completed your dog should understand that their crate is a safe place to be with comfy bedding, toys and food!

Step three - going out of sight

As your dog or puppy gains confidence about staying in their crate with the door shut you can start to gradually leave them on their own.

To make sure your dog's positive association with the crate continues place their favourite toy or tasty chew stick at the back of the crate.

- ★ Activity feeders such as a 'Kong' stuffed with food (peanut butter



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or cheese mixed with dog biscuits are usually popular) are a great option for keeping your dog or puppy entertained and gives them the opportunity to chew.

Once your dog or puppy has entered the crate shut the door, but stay sat quietly next to the crate where they can see you. Stay put for around 5 minutes - hopefully they should be more interested in their toy or Kong than they are in you. After 5 minutes leave the room quietly and calmly. Once you are out of sight go straight back in, sit quietly again for a short time and then let them out of the crate. Repeat this process several times a day and each time gradually increase the time that you are out of sight until you get to half an hour.

- ★ It's a good idea to practice this step at different times of the day so that your dog or puppy gets use to being left at a variety of times.
- ★ Always make sure that your dog or puppy has something to keep their attention e.g. a stuffed Kong. You do not want to teach them to bark or whine through boredom. If you let them out when they are being vocal, you will quickly teach them that if they make a noise you will come running! Wait until there is even the smallest gap in their noise and then let them out. Timing is key!

Step four - moving on

Once stage three is completed and your dog can be left for half an hour without showing any signs of distress you can start to leave your dog for short periods of time.

Your dog will be more inclined to relax when left alone if he/she has had an appropriate amount of exercise and has been fed before you go out.

- Always try to exercise your dog before leaving him/her
- Feed your dog a small meal shortly before leaving
- Always ensure that your dog goes to the toilet before being left alone

Don't make a big fuss when leaving your dog. Praise and reward



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them for getting into their crate and leave them enjoying the goodies you have left inside for them. On return keep arrivals low key to avoid increasing his/her anxiety over when you will return.

- It is never acceptable to shut your dog in the crate all day while you go to work. Adult dogs that have been successfully trained to have a positive association with their crate and view it as their safe haven are normally quite happy to be left for about three hours.
- Puppies are unable to hold their bladders and bowels like adult dogs can and this needs consideration when leaving him/her in the crate.

Ideally the crate should be a safe haven that your dog or puppy can choose to enter voluntarily - somewhere they can go to for peace, quiet and security.

OTHER POSSIBLE LINKS:

- [Dog welfare needs](#)

Links to the web pages of other organisations are provided for additional information only and do not imply any endorsement by the RSPCA of those organisations or of any content on the website.

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