

Houston Pets Alive! recommends crate training for all dogs. Crate training is an important part of having a well-behaved dog that doesn't tear things up and goes to the bathroom outside. While many people view crates through the human lens of being "caged up," dogs are naturally den animals and most enjoy being in small, enclosed places. A crate provides them with a feeling of security, and when trained to use them from an early age, crates can help calm anxiety. (Sharpe, 2021).

### Key Points

- Crate training gives dogs their own space and can calm anxiety. It is beneficial for their state of mind and to have a safe space to retreat to. It's like giving them their own "bedroom" in the home.
- Create positive associations with the crate through the use of treats and games. If crate training is done well, you may even find that the dog likes to spend time in the crate without you asking them to!
- Be patient! Crate training can take a while for puppies that are brand new to being in a kennel or for a dog that's not used to one. For puppies, crating goes hand-in-hand with potty training.

### Choose the Right Sized Crate

The crate should be big enough for the dog to turn around and stand up in. We generally use wire crates since they are lightweight and portable, but some dogs may prefer a more enclosed den. For dogs that prefer sleeping in the dark, you can cover the crate with a blanket or use a plastic airline crate.

For potty training, it's important that the crate doesn't have too much extra space. A crate that's too big will teach the puppy it's okay to relieve itself in the crate since it can go potty on one side of the crate and sleep on the other. Dogs are naturally tidy animals, so having a limited space will teach them not to soil their sleeping area!

### Creating a Positive Association

Dogs need to learn to associate the crate with a good mindset. If you put the dog in the crate when they're playing, then they'll want to come back out and continue to play. But if you bring them in when they're calm, they will likely view it as a place of rest. Start by bringing them in for short periods of time and work your way up from there. (Sharpe, 2021)

When first starting out with the crate, you can create a positive association by feeding the dog in the crate and giving them chew toys, like a stuffed KONG. You don't want to use the crate as a punishment or put the dog in there when you're frustrated with them. If you are frustrated, stay as neutral as you can while bringing them to the crate and praise them once they go in. You can also offer a treat every time they walk in the crate.

Leave the crate open throughout the day in case the dog decides to go in on their own. When you first start practicing closing the door to the crate, make sure to start with small increments of time. Start with 10 minutes of

### Preventing Separation Anxiety

Some dogs get anxious when you put them in the crate because they know the ritual and guess

that you're about to leave. To prevent them from recognizing this pattern and becoming anxious, we recommend crating the dogs regularly even when you don't need to have them crated. If you're just hanging out around the home and the dog is in a calm state of mind, you can put them in the crate for a little bit to relax while you go about your business.

Avoid excitement whenever you leave home and come back. Dogs don't understand that you'll be home soon after work or running errands, so we want them to view the crate as a mundane thing. Don't say "goodbye" to the dog too dramatically when you leave, they don't understand human language and will pick up on your energy instead. This can get them too excited or upset since they don't understand why you're getting worked up about leaving. Similarly, we also don't want to work them up too much when we return. They won't understand why you're so excited about coming home. Overexcitement about returning can also encourage a dog to bark excessively whenever you get back. Make leaving and returning as casual as possible so the dog stays calm throughout the daily routines.

Practice crating the dog in different rooms around the home so they get used to being kenneled up in different spaces. For example, if you are going to be spending time in the kitchen cooking, you can crate them in the bedroom so they are "away" from you.

### Tips and Tricks

- Always give your dog a potty break before putting them in the crate, and don't forget to take them outside immediately after letting them out. This is especially important for puppies, whose "hold time" is still developing. (Schade, 2022)
- Don't crate your dog for too long. Doing so might force them to soil inside. Again, this is the biggest concern for puppies, whose "hold time" is roughly their age in months translated to hours. That means a 4-month-old puppy can hold it for about four hours. (Remember, play and excitement can make your pup need to go out more frequently, too.) For adult dogs, avoid crating them for more than four hours. That means that you should plan for a midday break if you'll be leaving your dog crated during the work day. (Schade, 2022)
- Feeding your dog's meals in their crate with the door open can help to make it a positive spot. If they're reluctant to eat inside, place the bowls next to the crate for a few meals, then just inside of it, then finally, at the back of the crate. (Schade, 2022)
- Remember that there's a difference between "frustration" noises and "I gotta go" noises. If you've just returned from a potty trip, a dog whining in the crate for the first few minutes is likely just settling in. (Schade, 2022)
- Dogs should never, ever have collars or tags or anything on when they're in the crate, if the tag gets caught in the crate the dog could strangle. (Sharpe, 2021)
- Play crate games! The dog shouldn't see the crate as a negative place. To ensure this, incorporate the crate into fun games where the pup goes in and out of the open crate at their own will. You can throw the ball in the crate when playing fetch or hide treats inside for the dog to find. (Sharpe, 2021)

### Sources

Sharpe, S. (2021, November 5). *How to Crate Train Your Dog in Nine Easy Steps*. AKC. <https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/training/how-to-crate-train-your-dog-in-9-easy-steps/>

Schade, V. (2022, November 4). *How to Crate Train a Dog: A Step-by-Step Guide From an Expert*. beChewy. <https://be.chewy.com/how-to-crate-train-a-puppy-a-step-by-step-guide-from-an-expert/>