



Training Plan: Crate Training

Crate training is a bit of a polarizing topic. A heavily American concept, crates are not used in dog training in parts of the world. Crating for long periods of time (more than four hours) is never recommended as it can be damaging to our dog's physical, mental, and emotional well-being. However, it is recommended for dogs to be crate trained as they may find themselves confined during travel or at the veterinarian. Crates can also be useful tools in managing housetraining and destructive behavior.

End behavior: Your dog will happily and comfortably enter their crate on cue and stay in the crate for up to four hours with or without people at home.

Why This Is Useful: Having a positive association with a crate allows a dog a safe space to retreat to if they feel uncomfortable or need rest. Crates also provide boundaries for dogs that are working on housetraining or destructive behaviors.

Method 1 - Food Lures and Puzzles

- Step 1: Place a few treats in the rear of the crate and leave the crate door open. When your dog is freely going in and out of the crate, go to Step 2.
 - If your dog needs more encouragement, drop a trail of treats leading into the crate.
 - If your dog won't enter the crate for any treats, proceed to method two.
- Step 2: In one motion, point to the crate and toss a treat from your pointing hand into the crate so that your dog goes in to get it. Practice this 10 times.
- Step 3: Do the same pointing motion that you did earlier, but this time don't toss a treat from that hand. If your dog goes into the crate, mark and give a treat from your other (non-pointing) hand. Practice this 10 times.
 - If your dog does not go in for the pointing motion only, go back and repeat step two.
- Step 4: Standing next to the crate, say "crate!" and then make the pointing motion to the crate. When your dog enters, mark and give treats from the non-pointing hand. Practice this 10 times.
- Step 5: Standing next to the crate, say "crate" and don't make the pointing motion. Wait for your dog to go into the crate for the verbal cue only. Practice this 10 times. When your dog is going into their crate for the "Crate" cue only, go to Step 6.
 - If your dog does not go in for the "crate" cue only, make the pointing motion to the crate. Keep working with your dog this way until you see that they are starting to go in for the "crate" cue only and not wait for the pointing motion.
- Step 6: When your dog enters the crate, briefly shut the door, then toss an extra-special treat (EST) into the crate. When your dog has finished eating it, toss another EST into the crate, open the door, and allow your dog to exit.
- Step 7: Gradually increase the time that your dog is in the crate with the door closed. The easiest way to accomplish this is by feeding the dog in the crate with food puzzles and/or frozen Kongs, marrow bones or muffin tins, which take

incrementally longer periods of time to consume. Always use an EST to reward your dog for going into the crate and right before coming out of the crate. When your dog can spend 15 minutes in the crate, go to Step 8.

- Step 8: Begin leaving the room for short periods of time while your dog is in the crate. Leave your dog in the crate with a frozen Kong, a food puzzle, and/or a favorite toy or two, as well as blankets or other comfort items. Increase the amount of time until your dog can spend 30 minutes in the crate without someone there. Go to proofing.

Method 2 - Feeding meals in the crate

- Step 1: Begin by placing your dog's meal in a bowl as near to the crate as they will go.
- Step 2: Gradually move the bowl closer to the crate over the course of a few meals.
- Step 3: When your dog is relaxed eating near the crate, begin placing the meal just inside the crate.
- Step 4: Gradually move the meal toward the back of the crate.
- Step 5: When your dog is entering the crate with their entire body, proceed to Step 1 of Method 1.

Tips

- Never force your dog into the crate. The goal of crate training is to make the crate a safe, happy place where your dog will want to go and spend time. If, at any time, during crate training your dog appears anxious or unhappy about being in the crate, back up into the previous step.
- If your dog is crying, whining, barking, etc. while in the crate, let them out. You are not reinforcing the vocalizing behavior; your dog is scared/anxious and needs comfort.
- Don't ever put your dog in the crate as punishment. It may make your dog afraid of their crate, or it may even seem like a reward (since the crate is a place that they should love to go).

Proofing means teaching the dog to generalize the behavior in different contexts. You will want your dog to be comfortable with the crate in different locations, different times of day, and be willing to enter/exit the crate for different people. See the [Stages of Learning Handout](#) for more details.

