

Golden Rule Training

Crate Training Your Dog

There are a few reasons to crate your dog inside the home. Because dogs are den animals, crates are a good substitute and provide your dog with an indoor hideaway that can satisfy a dog's need for a safe enclosure. Crates can also be used as an effective housebreaking tool; dogs do not typically soil where they sleep and eat so by crating (for no more than 4 hours at a time) and releasing them to go outside helps the dog hold "it" until they can go outside. In addition, your dog can be crated while traveling in the car, making the ride safer for your dog. We also recommend crating when you first bring your dog home for a short period to assess their house training habits and to ensure they are not destructive.

We do not recommend using a crate for punishment, and crating for more than 4 hours at a time is considered cruel. In addition, crating outside in the yard is also not recommended.

Many dogs like to sleep in their crates; most like to find a safe place where they can go to rest. At night when dogs sleep, their body systems and elimination slow down. This is why they can go all night without having to go outside to potty. Puppies, however, would have to go out more frequently as their bladders are not as large as an adult dog.

Using a Crate for House Training

Using the crate for house training is a great option, but is a temporary tool. The goal is to train your dog to go potty outside and when he is successful, the crate is no longer used for that purpose. Once your dog can be trusted, you can still keep the crate for your dog to sleep or hang out in; just leave the crate door open.

Daily crating of more than 4 hours could compromise your dog's mental and physical well-being. It is a pet owner's responsibility to provide adequate exercise before a long stay in the crate; we recommend at least 45-minute brisk walk or playing fetch to tire your pup. If you crate your dog overnight, he should receive at least 60 to 90 minutes of outdoor exercise in the morning before going back in the crate at night.

Puppy Schedule:

For puppies working on house training, follow the daytime duration guidelines below:

Maximum time in crate:

- 8–10 weeks of age the puppy needs to go out every 30 to 60 minutes
- 11–14 weeks of age the puppy needs to go out every 1 to 3 hours
- 15–17+ weeks of age the puppy can go out every 3 to 4 hours

Once your dog is fully trained and trusted, he should have freedom in the house while you are gone. The crate can still be used for sleeping by leaving the crate door open so he can

go in and out. Another option is putting in a doggy-door so your dog can go outside when needed.

Crating a Puppy

Puppies require a lot of attention, and it is best if someone is home to properly potty train and socialize the pup. Puppies must not be left in a crate for 8 hours a day, as this can cause serious behavior problems; such as house soiling, anxiety, and in some cases, aggressive behavior. Puppies need interaction with you so they learn acceptable behavior in the home. They also need a midday break from the crate every day. Even with a break, the puppy will still have to tolerate two four-hour periods of confinement, which is a long time!

If you have a puppy under 16 weeks old, and he has been crated 4 hours, expect soiling in the crate and DO NOT punish the puppy! Make sure he sure he gets a good romp in the morning before you leave for work, during lunch and after work. If you cannot go home during your lunch break, you may consider having a neighbor or a dog walker visit the puppy midday. He should get to enjoy some playtime in the morning and another play and training session when you come home from work. Again, puppies require a lot of work and attention!

Using the Crate for House Training

Acclimate your dog or puppy to the crate by leaving the crate door open. Start tossing a few treats around and into the crate, while he is not looking, so he can discover them on his own. Use something that your dog will love, like small pieces of chicken, cheese, hot dog or freeze-dried liver. You can also leave a new Nylabone or a stuffed rubber Kong toy inside the crate (never leave a dog alone with a toy other than a Nylabone or a Kong as these are safe to give your dog while unsupervised).

Periodically leave special treats in your dog's crate throughout the evening, and continue to do so every day or so for the next few weeks.

If he seems too uncomfortable to go into the crate at first, you can put the treats just inside the door instead. He will then put his head in the crate. Over time, as your dog becomes more and more comfortable with his crate. If your dog sometimes finds surprise goodies in her crate, he will associate the crate with good things!

Crate Training with Cues:

Step One:

1. Add a cue to ask your dog to go into the crate, such as "Go to your crate" or "Kennel-up" (Choose whatever cue you like, just be sure you always use the same one).
2. Show your dog one of the treats and toss it in the crate. After he goes inside to eat it, praise him enthusiastically, and feed him another treat while he is still inside and say, "Good boy!"
3. Next release him by saying, "Okay" and toss a treat outside the crate to release him; this lets him know he can come out again. Treat this as a fun game!

4. Repeat the steps above 10 or more times. Take a short break and then do another set of 10 repetitions. After your second set, end the training session and repeat the following day.

Step Two:

Once your dog understands the enter cue and the release cue, then reinforce the training:

1. Give your cue, "Go to your crate," and point to the crate. When you point, it might help to move your arm like you did when tossing a treat into the crate. The familiar motion can remind your dog what he is supposed to do
2. When your dog goes in, praise him and immediately give her a couple of treats while she's still in the crate
3. Say "Okay" and let your dog come out of the crate (toss a treat outside the crate again to help him understand he is being released)

Practice 10 repetitions and then take a short break. Repeat the exercise another 10 times—or until your dog seems to know the game and enters and exits readily when you ask her to.

If your dog seems nervous about going into the crate or confused about what he is supposed to do when you say the cue, go back and practice Step One for a while longer. When your dog confidently rushes into the crate to get her treat, you can try step two again.

Canine Complaining

At this point in your training, your dog might start to object to confinement in his crate. If he barks or whines:

1. Ignore her entirely. He is trying to get your attention, so do not reward his barking by giving in and letting him out. As soon as he stops vocalizing for a few seconds, you can give him a treat. With repetition, your dog will learn that he will be ignored if he makes noise, but if he is quiet, he receives a tasty treat.
2. As soon as your dog starts to bark or whine, make some sort of noise to let him know that this is not acceptable. You can say, "eh-eh" and then immediately leave the room. Do not come back until your dog has been quiet for at least 5 to 10 seconds. With repetition, your dog will learn that making noise makes you instantly leave but being quiet makes you come back.

It is important that you respond consistently when your dog makes noise in his crate. It may be frustrating at first, but if you stick to the steps above he will learn to be quiet. Be patient and consistent!

Puppies are easier to crate train than older dogs, as they have no frame of reference. However, rescued dogs may have a harder time, especially if they grew up as an outside dog. They will not understand why they are now confined. Never force a dog into a crate, they can see this as an aggressive move on your part and react accordingly.

When NOT to Crate Your Dog

Do not use a crate to contain your dog simply because he is a nuisance and requires attention. A puppy or young dog can sometimes be annoying and exhausting, but it is unfair and negligent to lock her up rather than provide the attention and training she needs.

Do not put your dog in her crate to punish. If you do, he will associate the crate with something he does not like!

When NOT to Use a Crate

Dogs who suffer from separation anxiety should not be confined in a crate. If your dog shows any of the following signs of separation anxiety, please locate a qualified expert in your area. The signs of anxiety can be:

- Destructiveness, vocalizing or house soiling during the first 30 minutes after you leave your dog alone in the house
- Destructive behaviors that consistently occur only when he's left by himself in the house
- Destructive behavior directed at windows, doors, flooring in front of doors or items with your scent, like shoes, clothing, seat cushions, etc.

Some dogs do not tolerate crating well due to other types of fears or anxieties, like thunder phobia. Do not crate your dog if you see signs of anxiety when he is crated, such as:

- Damage to the crate from your dog's attempts to escape
- Damage to surrounding objects that he's been able to reach while inside the crate
- Excessive foaming or drooling
- Urination or defecation in the crate
- Your dog moves the crate while he's inside (the crate is not where you left it)
- Excessive barking or howling during your absence (You can get reports from neighbors or record your dog's behavior using a video camera.)

In addition, do not crate your puppy or dog if:

- She's too young to have sufficient bladder or bowel control
- She has diarrhea
- She's vomiting
- You must leave her alone for longer than the time indicated in the crate duration guidelines above
- She hasn't eliminated shortly before going in the crate
- The temperature is uncomfortably high or low
- She has not had sufficient exercise, companionship and socialization

If your dog is vomiting or has diarrhea please see your veterinarian to rule out any medical issues. If your dog is experiencing anxiety, then that behavior has to be addressed before you try crating your dog (see the article on Separation Anxiety in the Golden Rule library at <http://homewardboundgoldens.org/training/>).

In some cases, dogs may find the crate too stressful and using one is not an option. Please be careful in these cases as their fear can turn into aggression quickly. If a dog is cornered or forced, they may react by acting aggressively to protect themselves.

Sources

ASPCA, Weekend Crate Training

www.aspcabehavior.org

American Dog Trainers Network