

# Housebreaking and Crate Training

There are several ways to housebreak your new puppy, but the method that seems to work the fastest is crate training. In crate training your puppy is placed in his crate any time he cannot be watched when you are away, when you are sleeping, when you are cooking and eating, or whenever your attention is otherwise occupied. Because most puppies and dogs do not like to soil the area where they sleep, your pup learns to hold it while he's in the crate, and to wait for you to come to take him out before he eliminates.

Crate training method works best because you are teaching your dog an absolute rule: you NEVER go in the house; you ALWAYS go outside. With paper or puppy pad training you're teaching your dog this rule: you can go inside on this paper, but not there on that paper, and only when we're gone because when we're here you're supposed to hold it and let us know that you need to go outside. Got it? I didn't think so! Because with crate training your dog learns to **hold it** and the **absolute rule**, he will have less confusion, learn faster, and have fewer accidents as he gets older.

Some people think that crates are cruel, and resist the idea of putting their puppy in a cage. But dogs are den animals and they like to cuddle up in confined spaces under beds, behind couches, in closets or boxes. If introduced and used properly, a crate becomes a puppy's den or personal room. He can sleep in his crate and feel comforted by its walls. He can retreat to his crate when he's feeling overwhelmed or tired from too much play, and his den can go with him when you travel.

A crate is a good investment as well because even after your puppy is housebroken he will probably not be ready to have free run of the house when you are gone. Puppies and even adult dogs can be destructive when they are unsupervised. They can also get into things that might injure them or make them sick. Also, puppies and dogs need much more sleep than humans do. If they are getting the proper amount of exercise, they will usually sleep most of the time you are away. If your puppy is crate trained, he can snooze safely, and you can rest assured he isn't ingesting cleaning supplies, or chewing your shoes!

Like any training tool, however, a crate can be used improperly. A crate should not be used excessively. Your puppy should have plenty of time outside of his crate, playing with you and other family members, stretching his legs, exploring and exercising. You can use the crate to give yourself a time out when you've had enough of your puppy's antics and are irritated or frustrated with your puppy (bringing home a new puppy can be stressful!) but you shouldn't use the crate in an angry fashion or as a punishment. This may cause your puppy to associate the crate with something negative, and you and your puppy will not enjoy the full benefits of the using the crate.

## Selecting a Crate

Crates come in two styles: a wire crate and a plastic airline crate. The wire crates are cooler and most will fold flat when disassembled, making transport or storage easier. Plastic crates are cheaper, easier to clean, and can be used for traveling. Remember the interior of an airline crate will be warmer than the surrounding room, so be careful to place them in areas where there is adequate ventilation and temperature control. Which style you choose will depend upon your preference, your puppy's preference (if he's already used to one style) and availability.

The size of your crate is very important. The crate should be large enough so that your puppy can stand up, turn around and lay down **comfortably**, but not so large that he can eliminate in one end and lay down at the other. \*Extra tip: A rubber-backed bathrug is the

perfect crate floor lining. They are inexpensive, soft, machine-washable, can be cut to fit any size crate, and the rubber back keeps them from bunching up or sliding around on the crate floor.

### **Introducing Your Puppy to the Crate**

Bring your crate with you when you come to pick up your puppy. It is always best to keep your puppy in his crate when you are in the car.

When you arrive home, put the crate in a high traffic area of your home so that when your puppy is in the crate he will still be a part of your daily family life. Take your puppy out of the crate and immediately take him outside to potty. Praise him enthusiastically when he goes. Then take him inside and introduce him to his new surroundings. Keep a watchful eye on your puppy so that you can interrupt him and rush him outside if he circles, squats or shows other signs that he needs to go.

While he is exploring or playing with you, stop the play every few minutes and put your puppy into the crate. You can use a treat to lure him in if he is reluctant. Close the door for just a few seconds, then let him out to play again; gradually work up to the point where he is spending longer periods of time in the crate. Most puppies adapt to the crate very quickly. Your puppy should be in the crate whenever you cannot keep your eyes on him because, although accidents are inevitable (nobody's perfect!), every time he has the opportunity to eliminate in the house, you've taken a small step backwards in housebreaking. \* **Important: be sure to remove your puppy's collar if you are leaving him the crate while you are gone. A collar can get caught or snagged on a part of the crate and cause strangulation.**

### **How often should I take my puppy outside during the day?**

As a general rule, puppies can hold it one hour for every month of age. At night they can hold it two hours for every month of age. But puppies need to be taught the concept of holding it and that's where the crate comes in. In the beginning, take your puppy out every twenty to thirty minutes is ideal. The more chances she has to get it right the better.

Your puppy should be taken from her crate and directly outside **after each nap** and **after each meal**. Feed her on a schedule (three times a day for puppies younger than 16 weeks; twice a day thereafter) so that she will eliminate on a schedule. Do not, however, restrict her access to water.

It's really hard, but you shouldn't play with your puppy until she goes to the bathroom. Put her on a leash if she seems too distracted or uncontrollable. Take her to an area where she has gone potty before (so that she can smell it there) and circle her around the area. Use a command like get busy! or Ahurry up! in a happy encouraging tone. You may feel silly at first but eventually this command will make your life much easier! When she goes, praise her for being such a good, smart dog (AGood Girl!! Get busy!! Get Busy!!!) and then give her some free play time, indoors or out. You can use treats as well, giving her something yummy every time she goes. If she doesn't go in 10 or 15 minutes, return her to her crate for another 15 minutes and then try again.

## What about at night?

When it's bedtime, take her outside one more time before you go to bed. Both you and your puppy will sleep better if you can keep the crate next to your bed, at least for the first few weeks. Dogs are pack animals, and they are comforted by the nighttime sounds of their sleeping pack members (you!).

Because her system slows down at night, your dog will not need to go as often at night as she does during the day, but if your puppy is younger than 14 or 16 weeks, she may need to be taken outside once during the middle of the night. You can go about this one of two ways. You can wait for her to wake you up as she squirms, becomes restless or whines to let you know that she has to go. Or you can set your alarm to go off four or five hours after you go to bed. With the alarm system, you can gradually set your alarm later and later until she is sleeping through the night. After a couple of weeks, she will learn to hold it until she hears the alarm.

## What if he has an accident in the crate?

Do not punish your puppy for having an accident in the crate. He didn't do anything wrong. It simply means that he needs to be taken out more frequently. Shorten the intervals between his potty breaks. You can use diluted bleach and a garden hose to clean the crate itself. Be sure to rinse it well and dry it before you use it again.

## What if he has an accident in the house?

One absolute rule for YOU as a dog owner is that you should never punish your dog for things that have already happened. Do not smack him with a newspaper, or rub his nose in it. Even if his accident happened only moments before, your puppy will not connect your anger and his punishment to the fact that he wet the carpet. He will simply come to mistrust you.

The best way to handle accidents in the house is to prevent them from happening. A young puppy needs **constant supervision**. If you cannot watch him, he should be in his crate. If you are watching him and he begins to circle, squat or otherwise show that he's about to go, scoop him up and run him outside. If you catch him in the act, you can interrupt him with a loud noise (clapping your hands and saying No! for example) and then immediately take him outside to finish. Be sure to praise him when he goes outside.

To clean up accidents, use a paper towel to soak up or pick up. Then take the paper towel outside and place it in the area of the yard where you'd like for him to go potty so that he will be able to smell it there the next time you take him outside. Then clean the carpet with an enzymatic cleaner like Nature's Miracle (available at most pet stores) or Oxy Clean. Ordinary carpet cleaners will get the stains and smell out to your satisfaction, but your dog's nose is much more sensitive than yours and he will be able to pick up the scent of his own urine and return to that spot again.

## How much time can my puppy spend in the crate?

In the beginning, the crate should be used primarily at night and for short sessions during the day (when you are distracted and cannot watch him, or when you are gone). Remember a puppy can hold it one hour for every month of age. He should not be kept in the crate longer than he is physically capable of holding it, otherwise he will be forced to eliminate in his crate and on himself. Over time, this can seriously and permanently deter housebreaking efforts a puppy that cannot keep himself clean will give up trying to keeping himself clean, making housebreaking nearly impossible.

Once he is more mature physically and is capable of holding it for several hours, you can leave him in the crate for up to four hours per day. When he's in his crate, always make sure he has access to water. Safe toys -- hard rubber toys without squeakers, Nylabones, or a stuffed Kong can be placed into the crate to keep him happy and occupied.

## What if I will be gone longer than four hours?

You can ask a neighbor to visit to give your puppy potty time and play time. If that's not possible, you can set up a safe area in your home -- a small, puppy-proof bathroom or laundry room, or use a baby gate to section off a small area in another room. Be sure it's a relatively small area and not a large open space; this will help to reinforce the idea of holding it. He should not have many choices about where to eliminate. Place his crate in the room with the door open. Be sure to leave him water and some safe toys to play with. Place newspapers at the back end of the room away from his crate, his water and the doorway.

If you are consistently gone for long periods of time during the day, housebreaking a puppy will take **much** longer than if you are home a great deal. Young puppies need lots of attention and direction from their owners. The more often you are there to give that attention and direction, the faster and more successful you will be with regard to housebreaking and with other training endeavors.

## How long should I use the crate?

How long you use the crate will depend upon your dog. Remember a crate is used to protect your puppy as well as to housetrain him. Before he is allowed free roam of the house while you are away, he should be **completely housebroken** and **trustworthy** (not destructive) while alone, which depending upon the dog, may take anywhere from 9 months to a lifetime. You can start out by leaving your dog alone and uncrated for short periods of time and gradually leaving for longer periods at a stretch. Or during the transition period you can confine your dog to one room or section one area off with a baby gate, giving the dog access to more areas as he proves himself trustworthy. Still, many dogs love their crates and even after they are well past the housebreaking and the destructive puppy stage, they return to their crates for naps and at bedtime.

## **What about crate training an adult dog?**

If you are adopting an older dog it is important not to let her have too much freedom in her new surroundings. After all, she doesn't know the layout of the house, where the door to the outside is, where she can go potty, what she can chew and can't chew, or what you expect of her. It isn't fair to put her in a position where she is certain to do something wrong that will displease you.

When you bring your new dog home, treat her as you would a new puppy. Assume that she isn't housebroken and confine her to a crate or to a small area using a baby gate whenever you cannot keep your eyes directly upon her. Take her out frequently, and praise her when she goes.

Remember that crate training is not just for housebreaking. There will be many situations where your dog might need to be in a crate for airline travel, for surgery recovery, for hurricane evacuation so it's always good to get your dog comfortable with being crated.

### **Most Importantly**

Be consistent and be patient with yourself and with your puppy or dog. Housebreaking is a lot of work, but your efforts will be richly rewarded with a well-trained new family member.

If you have any further questions about housebreaking, consider buying a book on the subject. There are also many Internet resources available to help you through this process. Of course, you are always encouraged to call or email us with any questions or concerns you might have.