



Crate training your dog

HALL VETERINARY SURGERY BEHAVIOUR ADVICE



The aim of crate training is to create a safe, secure place for your dog, where it will feel calm and relaxed—this becomes their 'Doggy Den' not their prison. By leaving the crate open and available, all the time, it can provide a safe retreat for your dog to go when it needs an escape from the crazy human world (e.g. children, other pets, storms and other stressful situations etc.) Some dogs will even take themselves 'off to bed' in the evenings. It is important to help your dog build the association that this is a safe and comforting place before you shut them into the crate. It can then be used for house-training, travel, preventing destructive behaviours, and keeping your dog safe when you are unable to supervise them.



CHOOSING A CRATE

Wire, plastic and tough nylon crates are available. The wire and nylon crates are collapsible, making them easy to transport. For dogs with noise phobias the metal wire crates are sometimes a little 'scary'. Many dogs prefer the 'closed in', den-like effect of the plastic and nylon crates, although you can create a similar effect with wire crates by covering them with a blanket. The crate should be large enough for your dog to easily stand up, with the head in a normal elevated position. Your dog must be able to turn around, and stretch out fully when lying down. Place the crate in an area where your dog is likely to feel secure.



TRAINING YOUR DOG TO LOVE THE CRATE

The following information can be applied to any area, other than a crate, that you may wish to use as a safe, secure confinement area for your dog, eg. a room such as the laundry.

Place the crate in an area that is easily accessible, but not in a thoroughfare. Ensure it has a comfortable bed inside. Comfort goes a long way to help dogs feel safe and settled so consider including old clothing you have slept in amongst their bedding. Comfort and the owner's smell goes a long way to settling the dog. Leave the door of the crate open. Encourage your dog to enter and explore the crate by tossing high value treats into the crate. You can feed your dog in the crate, leaving the door open so your dog can come and go as he pleases. Hide treats and toys (e.g. raw hides, stuffed food toys) in the crate, so when your dog enters the crate it is associated with a rewarding experience. Never use the crate for time out, or as a punishment. In this way you can help your dog build a positive and relaxing association with the crate.



You can even tether a Kong or chew bone in the back of the crate, so your dog stays in the crate to chew it. Once your dog is accustomed to the crate and enters on its own, you can start to shut the door for a second or two. As you shut the crate, push a tasty treat through the door. Your dog will learn that shutting the door means a treat is on the way. Next give your dog a longer lasting treat as you shut the door and open the door before he finishes. Over time you can gradually delay opening the door, so that your dog learns to stay calmly and quietly in the crate.

DO'S AND DON'TS

Never open the crate when your dog is crying or barking (unless it's distressed), or you will inadvertently teach your dog to vocalise in the crate. Instead, wait until it is calm and quiet before letting your dog out. If your dog is crying or pawing to get out, then you may have progressed too quickly with crate training and need to go back a few steps to ensure you build a positive association with being crated. Your dog should spend time in the crate when you are home. This will teach your dog that going to the crate does not always signal that you are about to leave the house.

With young puppies ensure you give them an opportunity to urinate/defecate before putting them in the crate. It is also helpful to play with your pup before putting him in the crate. This increases the likelihood of them falling to sleep and learning that the crate is a place for relaxing and being calm.

USING THE CRATE FOR HOUSE-TRAINING PUPPIES

Most puppies have a natural instinct to keep their 'den' area clean. Therefore, most puppies will try not to urinate or defecate in the crate. When you are unable to supervise your puppy you can put him in the crate, to prevent accidents in the house. A young puppy should not be crated for more than 3-4 hours at a time, without being given the opportunity to urinate/defecate outside. Do not make your puppy eliminate in the crate by expecting him to 'hold on' longer than he is physically able. Remember to reward all outdoor elimination.

For advice about dog training and behaviour issues PHONE: 6230 2223 or EMAIL: behaviouradvice@hallvet.com.au