

## CRATE TRAINING



The dog crate is designed as a safe, secure area that your dog can go into for short periods of time.

Dog crates have five main uses:

- Open 'den' area: some dogs benefit from having an open 'den' area that they can use as a safe place where they feel secure.
- Training aid: For example, helping puppies to learn to be left alone or for help with toilet training.
- Short term confinement: For example where owner supervision is not possible.
- Veterinary advised: In some circumstances a vet may advise the use of a crate for example to aid recovery of surgery.
- Transportation: Crates can help keep dogs secure and comfortable whilst being transported.

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT CRATE

The right dimensions of the crate will depend on the size of your dog. As a minimum your dog must be able to sit and stand at full height, turn around, stretch out and lie down in natural position.

If you are buying a crate for a puppy think about the size of crate they will need when they are fully grown.

The material of the crate must be safe for your dog and it should allow sufficient air to flow through it.

### **CREATE A SAFE HAVEN**

The following will help you turn the crate into a safe haven, where your dog can feel secure.

- Add some comfortable and soft bedding for your dog to lie on.
- Place some interesting safe chew toys inside.
- Find a location for the crate which is not in direct sunlight or in a draught.
- Placing a cover over part of the crate can help nervous dogs feel more secure.
- You can make sure they have access to water by using a clip on bowl to prevent them from tipping over.

## CRATE TRAINING PROCESS

When it comes to the crate training process there are two important points to remember.

- THINK POSITIVE - The crate should always be associated with something pleasant.
- BE PATIENT - Training should take place in a series of small steps. Don't go too fast.

## STEP ONE - INTRODUCTION TO THE CRATE

At this stage it is a good idea to place the crate in an area of the house where the family spends a lot of time and to fix the door of the crate open, so that it cannot swing shut and frighten your dog.

Start by placing some treats or a chew inside the crate and allowing your dog to explore at their own leisure. If your dog doesn't start exploring of their own accord you can help entice them by calling them over to the crate in a happy tone of voice or by throwing tasty treats near to the crate at first and then moving them progressively closer until you

are throwing the treats inside of the crate. If your dog is not motivated by food try the same progress with their favorite toy.

Once your dog is taking treats from inside the crate, continue throwing treats inside until they are happy to calmly walk all the way inside the crate to get the treats.

- REMEMBER to be patient. This might take several minutes or several days. Keep sessions short, about 3 minutes.

## **STEP TWO - SLOWLY INCREASE THE TIME SPENT IN THE CRATE**

A good way to start increasing the time your dog is happy to stay in the crate is by feeding them their meals in the crate.

Place their food at the back of the crate and if your dog enters it happily and starts eating you can close the door. However if your dog shows any signs of reluctance to enter or eat in the crate start by placing the food bowl outside the crate and through several sessions progressively move

the bowl inside the crate and then towards the back of the crate.

The first time you close the door while they are eating, open it as soon as they are finished. With each successive feeding leave the door closed a few minutes longer, until they are staying in the crate for ten minutes or so after eating.

If your dog whines to be let out or shows any signs of distress including panting, excessive barking, cowering or quickly. Go back a few steps and allow your dog to eat in the crate with the door open. From there move slowly and gradually in short sessions until your dog is comfortable staying in the crate for ten minutes or so after eating.

- Once step two is completed your dog should understand that their crate is safe place to be with comfy bedding, toys and food.

### **STEP THREE - GOING OUT OF SIGHT**

As your dog gains confidence about staying in their crate with the door shut you can start to gradually leave them on their own.

To make sure your dogs positive association with the crate continues place their favourite toy or chew at the back of the crate.

- Activity feeders such as 'kongs' stuffed with food are a great option for keeping your dog entertained and gives them the opportunity to chew.

Once your dog has entered the crate shut the door, but stay sat quietly next to the crate where they can see you. Stay put for around five minutes - hopefully they will be more interested in their toy or 'kong' than they are in you. After 5 minutes leave the room quietly and calmly. Once you are out of sight go straight back in, sit quietly again for a short time and then let them out of the crate. Repeat this process several times a day and each time gradually. Increase the time you are out of sight until you get to half an hour.

- It's a good idea to practise this step at different times of the day so that your dog gets used to being left at a variety of times.
- Always make sure that your dog has something to keep their attention. You do not want to teach them to bark or whine through boredom. If you let them out when they are being vocal, you will quickly teach them that if they make a noise you will come running! Wait until there is even the smallest gap in their noise and then let them out. Timing is key!

#### **STEP FOUR - MOVING ON**

Once stage three is completed and your dog can be left for half an hour without showing signs of distress you can start to leave your dog for short periods of time.

Your dog will be more inclined to relax when left alone if they have had an appropriate amount of exercise and has been fed before you go out.

- Always try and exercise your dog before leaving them.
- Feed your dog a small meal shortly before leaving.
- Always ensure that your dog goes to the toilet before being left alone.

Don't make a big fuss when leaving your dog. Praise and reward them for getting into their crate and leave them enjoying the goodies you have left inside for them. On return, keep arrivals low key to avoid increasing their anxiety over when you will return.

It is never acceptable to shut your dog in the crate all day while you go to work. Adult dogs that have been successfully trained to have a positive association with their crate and view it as their safe haven are normally quite happy to be left for about 3 hours.

Puppies are unable to hold their bladders and bowels like an adult dog can and this needs consideration when leaving them in the crate.

Ideally the crate should be a safe haven that your dog can choose to enter voluntarily - somewhere they can go for peace, quiet and security.