

Hello! Greetings from Central Utah Wag-N-Train Dog Rescue & Training, Inc. Here's our March 2003 Training and Safety Tips E-mail Newsletter! It's a bit lengthy, but crate training is such an important topic we didn't want to leave anything out. Enjoy!

What is Crate Training ? by Leanne Gossett

Each year thousands of good pets are mistreated, abused, isolated, or abandoned by their owners because their owners were unable to deal with the behavioral problems of their pets. Used correctly a crate can be as valid a training tool as a dog leash. Please consider the use of crate training to give your dog the optimum opportunity of becoming a secure, loved and devoted family member.

What is a Dog Crate ? A dog "crate" is the general term referring to a rectangular enclosure consisting of a top, a floor, 3 sides, and a door. Crates can be constructed of wire, wood, metal, molded plastic or a combination of these materials. The purpose of a crate is to provide a secure short-term confinement area for safety, housebreaking, protection of household goods, travel, illness, or general control. Veterinarians, dog show exhibitors, obedience and field trial competitors, trainers, breeders, groomers, and anyone who regularly handles dogs have accepted, trusted, and routinely used dog crates since their inception. It is the individual pet owners, who for the most part, have rejected the idea of using a dog crate. Most consider the use of a crate as unfair confinement, or even harmful to the dog.

IS CRATE TRAINING AN ACT OF CRUELTY - OR KINDNESS ? As seen by Some Pet Owners : "Its like living in jail - its cruel - I'd never put my dog in a cage." For many typical pet owners, this is their first reaction. Being human beings, who value freedom, they envision crates as inhumane. Considering your pet as an extension of your human family, you do not wish to inflict unjust punishment upon your 4 legged child. Ask yourself if you would raise a child without a playpen or a crib to sleep in ?

As Perceived by the Dog : "I love having a place of my own; I have my blanket, my favorite toys, no body bothers me in here, it's all mine." OK, so this isn't a direct quote, but try to see a crate from another point of view. Dogs have a den instinct. The dog crate helps to satisfy this instinct. You see it as closed in - he sees it as security. You may object to being controlled - he only wants to please you and do whatever you wish. To you it is a "cage" - to him it is "home."

WHY WOULD I NEED A CRATE ? Correctly and humanely used, a dog crate can have many advantages for both you and your pet. With the use of a crate you can:

enjoy complete peace of mind when leaving your dog home alone, secure in your knowledge that you will not discover anything soiled or damaged upon your return, and that your dog is comfortable, safe, and not getting into any bad habits.

because dogs tend not to soil where they sleep - housebreaking your puppy can become easier. The close confinement of the crate encourages control, helps to establish a routine for outdoor elimination, and can help avoid "accidents" during the night or when left alone.

create an area to confine your dog at those times when his curiosity can be detrimental such as getting underfoot at meal time, or during family activities, or when you have guests.

travel safely - the driver won't be distracted, in the event that the driver has to hit the brakes the dog will not be thrown about the car. Your dog can:

enjoy the security of his "den" - his own place to retreat when tired, or ill.

can avoid the confusion and punishment resulting from problem behavior.

can more easily learn bowel and bladder control, and to associate elimination with going outdoors.

can be spared the isolation of being in a basement, garage, or the backyard.

can be included in family outings - rather than left alone or in a boarding kennel.

You want your pet to be part of your family and to show appropriate behavior. Your pet wants to please you. A dog crate can help you to develop the bond and relationship you both desire. USE a Crate - Don't ABUSE a Crate

A dog crate is not recommended for a dog that will routinely left alone all day. If long term crating is to be attempted, the dog **must be well exercised** both before and after crating, the dog will also need lots of personal attention, and should be allowed freedom at night (even sleeping near his owner). It is also critical that the crate be large enough to enable the dog to fully stretch out and freedom of movement. The crate must have a clip-on water dish. Under ideal circumstances, if you can arrange to have someone provide an exercise and attention period during the day; the crate retains it's "den" attributes as opposed to solitary confinement. Regarding puppies, a crate must be strictly used as a "play-pen" for general confinement. It must have adequate space for a sleeping area at one end and potty papers at the other. The crate should also be equipped with a clip-on water dish and dry food bowl. A puppy can be raised in this manner, but be sure that the puppy has a great deal of human contact, frequent breaks from confinement (for more than just outside to potty). To be well adjusted family member a dog needs human contact, whether the animal is crated or not, your dog needs play time, training time, and a time to simply relax in the company of the family to which he is a part (his pack).

WHAT KIND OF CRATE SHOULD I GET ? Each style of crate has advantages and disadvantages; therefore it will be up to you to determine which style of crate best suits your needs. Collapsible wire mesh crates have the advantage if being collapsible for transport, they have great air flow, and enable the puppy to see a wide portion of his surrounding area. Wire mesh crates however are difficult to clean, considering that debris will trap within the meshing. A wooden crate may "fit" more appropriately with your furniture, but they are heavy to move, and wood can not be cleaned as well as a non-porous surface. Metal crates also come in a collapsible style, but they are heavy to move and have a restricted visibility range. Molded plastic crates are lightweight, and easy to clean, however they do not collapse, making them awkward to transport or store.

HOW BIG SHOULD THE CRATE BE ? The crate should be long enough to allow the dog to lay down stretched out flat on his side, and tall enough to allow the dog to sit up without hitting his head. With purebred puppies the adult size is fairly easy to predict. Most crates are now in standardized size ranges; so selecting one that is appropriate for your dog has become much less complicated. When in doubt, get the next larger size. It is always better to have a crate that is too large as opposed to one that is too small.

CRATE LOCATION IN THE HOME Since the primary reason for using a crate is to confine the dog without isolating him, the crate should be placed in, or as close as possible, to a "people area". Areas such as the kitchen, family room etc. The crate should be positioned in a corner or have the sides and back loosely draped with a sheet or towel in order to enhance its den like appearance for the puppy. The crate location should also be free from drafts and not too near a direct heat source. Admittedly, a dog crate is not among those items considered "beautiful" furnishings ... it does however provide your puppy with his own room, and enables your home to remain intact while the pups training is progressing.

CRATING A PUPPY A young puppy (8-16 weeks) should normally adjust well to a crate as being his "own place." Any initial complaints he might voice are not normally due to the crate, but rather about his learning to accept the controls associated with his unfamiliar environment. The crate will help him to adjust to his new world more easily and quickly, since he is being introduced to this new world only a small portion at a time.

Crating Routine With the crate situated in it's location, the crate needs to be furnished. Bedding can be provided by using an on towel or piece of blanket which can be washed (should an accident occur) and some worn unlaundered article of clothing such as a tee shirt, or old shirt (to help familiarize him with your scent). Do not put food or water in a puppy crate. The puppy will only upset the dishes, and this

is his bedroom - you do not eat in bed. Make it clear to children that the crate is not a "playpen" for them, it is the puppy's room. You should, however accustom the puppy from the start that people can reach into the crate at any time, so that the puppy does not become overly protective of his crate. A "crate routine" should be established immediately, closing the puppy in the crate at regular intervals for 1 to 2 hours during the day. The puppy's nap times will help guide you in establishing these times. Additionally, whenever the puppy must be left alone for a period of time, or is going to be unsupervised the pup should be crated. Prior to crating, be sure to remove the pup's collar which could become caught in an opening. At night, in the beginning, you may want to place the crate in a small enclosed area such as a bathroom or laundry room. Placing the crate in this area with the door left open and newspapers nearby, enables the pup to relieve itself without soiling it's crate. Once the pup matures he will develop greater bladder and bowel control. When the pup has sufficient control, and if there is no intestinal upset, he can be crated all night in his usual place. There may be setbacks - but don't give up - the keys are consistency and perseverance. The pup will adjust to the routine - you will have a secure well adjusted companion. If you do not choose, or not able, to use the crate permanently, you should plan on using the crate for at least 5 to 6 months. At this age your pup will be past the teething phase - at which time you can start leaving the crate door open at night, or when someone is at home during the day, or when he is going to be left alone for a brief period of time. If there are no incidences for a week or two, and the dog is behaving well when left alone, you may be ready to remove the crate itself and place the dog's bedding in the same spot. Initially the dog may miss the crate enclosure, but the dog still has his "place", and the habit of good behavior should continue. If any problems arise the crate routine can be re-established.

CRATING AN ADULT DOG The most common behavior problem of older puppies (over 6 months) or adult dogs is caused by the lack of a feeling of security when left alone. A crate can help to fulfill this need, and will hopefully solve the problems, but it must be introduced gradually. You must make every possible effort to be sure that the dog's association with the crate is positive and pleasant. The owner must also remember that the crate is not to be used for frequent long-period usage.

How to condition the dog to the crate Be sure that the crate is of adequate size (see *How Big Should the Crate Be ?*). Be sure that the crate is properly positioned (see *Crate Location in The Home*). Secure the door open, so that it can not accidentally shut and frighten the dog. Do not put the bedding in the crate. Allow the dog to investigate the crate, then lure the dog inside the crate by tossing "special" tidbits (cheese, liver, hotdog) into the far end. Allow the dog to turn and come back out. Praise him enthusiastically for his conquest of his fears. When the dog is confidently entering the crate place his bedding and an object with your scent in the crate. Coax the dog inside the crate and try to entice him (with food if necessary) to lie down and relax. Do not wrestle him into place, he must be comfortable - not forced. Continue this pattern for several days. Encourage the dog to use the crate as much as possible, and shutting the door briefly while you sit beside him or are nearby. The dog may resist in your efforts to give him a secure home. You must remain firm and consistent, so that the dog will understand you want him to be in the crate and be quiet. He may not be content in the crate but he will accept that this is your desire. As soon as he has accepted the crate and you are confident that he will remain quiet when closed in, you can safely leave him alone. Give him a chew toy or a safe bone to entertain him while you are gone. Be sure that his collar is removed, so that it won't get caught on anything. You may want your first outing to be brief (2 to 1 hour), proving to yourself that he has quietly accepted confinement and reassuring him that you have indeed come back to him. With the acceptance of the crate as his "special place" the dog will stop being a problem and start being a pleasure. In due time you may be able to start weaning him from use of the crate without resuming problem behavior.

Is Crating Always Successful ? Unfortunately, no. Nothing is 100 percent for all dogs, each dog is an individual. Success rates are much higher for puppies, than for "senior" dogs. If, despite every effort at positive conditioning and genuine firmness, the dog is obviously frantic or totally miserable when confined to a crate, then forcing the animal into such a situation is indeed inhumane and can result in physical injury when the dog tries to chew his way out.

Even though the crate is not 100 percent successful, it is always worth a try. You may have to try a

variety of approaches to convince your dog that this is what you want and that the crate is a safe secure den.

Other excellent reference sites:

<http://www.inch.com/~dogs/cratetraining.html>

<http://www.ddfl.org/behavior/cratetraining.htm>

<http://www.wonderpuppy.net/canwehelp/crate.htm>

<http://www.perfectpaws.com/crt.html>

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