

Crate Training your Puppy

Why crate train

Crate training is incredibly helpful in promoting good sleep habits and behavior in your dog. Some of the benefits to crate training include establishing security, assisting with house-training, helping with over-stimulation, and reduced night waking. Giving your dog a safe space to sleep in, and predictable routines, helps them feel secure. Crate training also sets both you and your puppy up for success when it comes to working on common problem behaviors. When you and your puppy have the same set of predictable rules and expectations everyone benefits. Being able to have your puppy spend some time in their crate when you cannot directly supervise them sets them up for success. Starting at an early age is key. While the process might seem daunting at first, (especially during those middle of the night wakeups) consistent work on your part will have lasting benefits for both you and your puppy.

Getting started

Crate training is a process that doesn't happen overnight. It is important to remember that progress can sometimes appear slow but in the end the effort will pay off. Begin by choosing a place for your dog's crate to go. It should be out of direct traffic in the home so your pup can feel safe, but not so out of the way that your dog is completely isolated. Choose a crate that is slightly larger than the dog who will occupy it, he/she should be able to stand up and lie down comfortably. If your puppy is going to do a lot of growing, you can choose a crate that will fit their adult size but use a partition to only use part of the space. Your puppy should feel like their crate is their "den", a special space that they can retreat to whenever they need a break.

The Process

Once you have placed your crate in its permanent home leave the door open so your puppy can become familiar with it. Find a high value treat, such as liver, hot dog, cheese, or peanut butter and place a small taste inside the crate. Never force your puppy in the crate when beginning training, the goal here is to have your dog willingly go in and out.

Once your puppy has tested out the space a few times you can begin working on longer time spent inside. Have your puppy on a leash to start the next phase. Take a Kong or other treat dispensing toy and fill with an extra special treat such as peanut butter. Let your dog have a lick and then place the toy inside the crate with the door CLOSED. The goal here is to have your puppy REALLY want to go inside to get their treat. After a minute or two allow your puppy inside the crate to get their Kong. If they are relaxed, try shutting the door for a minute or two. Before they have finished their treat open the door and have them come out again, leaving the

unfished Kong inside. Shut the door and wait for your dog to try to get back in again. Open the door and let them go in and finish their Kong. Repeat this game several times over the course of several days until your puppy is asking to go into the closed crate and doesn't resist the door being shut. After this step you can gradually increase the length of time you keep the door shut for and begin walking away and coming back to release your puppy from the crate.

Problem Solving

It is only natural that your dog will resist the crate at times when he or she wants to be where you are. This usually results in barking and whining. It is important when this happens that you do not allow your dog out of the crate while there are making a fuss, this will only reward the behavior and prolong it. Instead, wait for them to quiet down. If you have been working on other training such as "sit" and "wait", use this as a time to practice. Ask your dog to sit and wait quietly before you will open the door. This will likely need to be repeated quite a few times before your young dog gets the hang of it but before long you will both find it a predictable routine to follow. To avoid any confusion, follow the same pattern and use the same cue words when putting your dog in the crate and releasing them. An example could be every night at bedtime filling your dogs Kong with peanut butter, placing it in the crate, putting them inside using the same cue words such as "night night", shutting the door, and turning the lights out in the room. In the morning it could look like opening the curtains, asking for a "sit" and "wait" and then opening the crate door.

Keys to Success

It is important that you follow your veterinarians' recommendations for length of time it is appropriate to leave your pet in a crate without a potty break based on their age. While some young dogs can go all night without a trip outside, others may need that middle of the night walk until they are a little older and it is important that you set them up for success by taking them out when nature calls. A good rule of thumb is to add a one to your puppy's age in months to get the maximum number of hours your puppy should spend in the crate. For example, a three-month-old puppy should not spend more than four hours straight inside their crate. As with all forms of puppy training, crate training will be much more successful if you can make it a positive experience for your puppy. This might mean taking a slow and steady approach but will ultimately be met with less resistance from your furry friend and lead to a positive association with their crate long-term.

If, at any time, you are struggling with crate training reach out to the doctors and nurses at Main Street Vet. Our goal is to help you and your puppy have a successful experience with all aspects of training and we are always willing to discuss any challenges you may be having to see if we can give you more helpful suggestions in the process.