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Crate Training

Creating a Canine Haven

We all need a special place to call our own—a sanctuary of sorts. Your pet is no different. Part of raising a healthy dog is providing him with his own sanctuary, and crates are a perfect solution. Both puppies and dogs can be easily trained to enjoy the retreat to their crate.

Crate training is neither cruel nor unfair, provided your puppy has sufficient exercise and an opportunity to eliminate before you place him in the crate. However, allowing your dog to wander through the home unsupervised to investigate, chew, and eliminate is unwise and potentially dangerous.

You and Your Dog Will Love Crates

There are numerous benefits to crate training your dog:

- Security for your dog
- Safety for your dog
- Prevention of costly damage (due to chewing, investigation, elimination, etc.)
- Help with training proper chewing and elimination
- Easy traveling (helps your dog become accustomed to caging for traveling and boarding)
- Improved dog / owner relationship (fewer problems mean less discipline for your puppy and less frustration for you)

A tip or two

The first step is purchasing a crate. The main thing to remember is to leave enough room for your dog to stand and turn around—even when he is full-grown. Two basic styles exist: the metal, collapsible crates with tray floors and the plastic traveling crates. Some dogs adapt better to a small room, run, or playpen.

Because dogs are social animals, the ideal location for the crate is in a room where your family spends a lot of time, such as the kitchen, den, or bedroom. Avoid keeping the crate in an isolated laundry or furnace room. For the crate to remain a positive, enjoyable retreat never use it for punishment. You can, however, use the crate to avoid potential problems (e.g., chewing, housesoiling). A radio or television can help calm your dog and mask environmental noises that sometimes trigger barking.

Training Puppies

Introduce your puppy to the crate as early in the day as possible. Place a few treats, toys, or food in the crate to motivate your puppy to enter voluntarily.

The first confinement session should be after a period of play, exercise, and elimination (when he is ready to take a nap). Place your puppy in his crate with a toy and a treat, and close the door. Leave the room but remain close enough to hear your puppy. You can expect some degree of distress the first few times your puppy is separated from his family members. Never reward the pup by letting him out when he cries or whines. Ignore him until the crying stops, and then release him.

If crying does not subside on its own, a light correction may be useful. Avoid any excessive correction—it can cause fear and anxiety, which could aggravate the whining or cause elimination. When correcting, try to avoid being seen by your puppy so that he does not learn to associate the punishment with your presence. A squirt from a water gun or a startling noise (try shaking an aluminum soda can containing a few coins) can be used to interrupt barking. Or try a remote control device that turns on a water pik or alarm strategically placed near the crate. There are commercial bark-activated devices that produce a distracting spray or alarm when your dog barks. Owners can fit their puppies with the devices or place them near the crate. If these devices do not immediately curb the barking or seem to cause distress, do not continue using them.

Training Adult dogs

Training an adult dog is similar to training a puppy, except for the initial introduction to the crate. Introduce your dog to the crate by setting it up in the feeding area with the door open for a few days. Place food, treats, and toys in the crate so that your dog enters on his own. Once he is entering the crate freely, it is time to close the door. Some dogs may adapt more quickly to crate training by placing the crate (with bedding inside) in your dog's normal sleeping area, allowing your dog to sleep in the crate at night. When punishing, take the same advice given for puppy training. Again, never punish your dog by putting him in his crate. Gradually increase the amount of time your dog must remain quietly in the crate before you release him.

Traveling with Fido

Finally, the crate is an ideal way to house your dog when traveling. Try short trips first and gradually increase travel time. Let your dog accompany you to the store, the park, or on trips around town—anywhere that will adjust help him to the crate and elicit positive feelings.