

Crate and Puppy Training your dog

A common scenario when I do home visits is failed use of a crate. A crate can be a brilliant training aid or long term item of equipment, giving your dog, children & home security and safety.

Below I refer to puppy, but the same applies whatever age of dog.

Once trained it is fine to leave your puppy in a crate overnight for sleeping and for short periods when left alone. Ensure your puppy has access to water. No dog or puppy should be left alone for long periods & certainly not in a crate. Your dog's collar should be removed when left unsupervised in a crate.

A crate should be 6 inches longer & taller than your dog, so when buying a crate for a puppy you need to allow for his growth. Your dog needs to be able to stand up, stretch and turn around comfortably. A young puppy will also need enough space for you to set up a 'toilet' area in the crate for him.

Your puppy needs to recognise the crate as a great place to be and his 'safe haven' when he wants to rest or sleep. Children should be taught not to disturb the puppy when he is in it.

Put the crate in the place where your puppy usually sleeps and put his bed in it. Encourage him to wander in by throwing treats into it. Put your puppy's food in the crate when you feed him. Use a kong, stuffed with goodies, so he only gets this in his crate. Sit on the floor by the crate and play with your puppy, make a fuss of him while he is in there.

All of this is to help your puppy build a positive association with the crate.

Once your puppy starts to wander into the crate quite freely, when he wants to rest or sleep, then you can start closing the door for brief periods.

One common mistake that people make is to only close the door when they leave the puppy alone. Pup then starts to associate the closed door with you leaving him and ends up happy in the crate as long as the door is open but becoming distressed whenever the door is closed.

When you start closing the door, sit on the floor by the crate & stroke your puppy through the bars. Just leave the door closed in short bursts to start with.

If the crate is in the kitchen you can start to close the door while you make a cup of tea so you are still in sight. Build this up slowly. You can get puppy used to being in the crate during your meal

times or when visitors first arrive. Give him a kong or something to do when you use the crate at times like this.

Once puppy is very settled in the crate with the door closed, then you can start to go into another room for a few minutes, building this up until you feel your puppy is ready to be left in it when you go out.

If you take time with your crate training you will find you have an extremely valuable piece of equipment not just for training but also for safety and peace of mind.