

Crate training

There are many benefits to crate training, but it's important to remember, for some dogs it is a very slow process.

Many families find crates a useful management tool for short periods of time. Before starting, it is important to recognise that not all dogs will be comfortable being confined in such small space and it might be more appropriate to use other methods such as pens or specific rooms. Crates are not to be used for long periods of confinement and should not be used to contain a dog near something that causes distress.

Should I crate train?

A crate is a useful tool but it's not compulsory. If you have a puppy who has been shipped at a young age, they may have negative associations attached to being in the crate so other management tools might be more appropriate. If you think you might like to compete in dog sports, or do not have another way to contain your dog in your home when needed, crate training can be a great option. Most importantly though, you do need to assign your dog a 'safe place', somewhere she can go where no will interact with her.

Things to remember

Go slow! Don't leave the puppy to 'cry it out'. The crate should be a safe place, if the puppy is distressed, ignoring them will likely make them more distressed and make crate training harder in the long run. You may have heard that this approach is most effective because generally, puppies will become so overwhelmed they will shut down and stop crying. This is not effective training as your puppy learns not only that the crate is scary but also that you will not help them when they are distressed. This approach can lead to future anxiety issues.

Make the crate a safe, fun space

Some pups do love the snugness a crate provides straight away and require very little training, but this isn't the norm. Most puppies need us to help make the crate feel like a safe place. We can do this by making the process slow and gentle, initially leaving the door open so they can choose whether to go in or out. Randomly drop treats in the crate when your puppy is not looking. We want them to think the crate magically produces good things. Leave food toys in the crate that the pup can't remove (such as a kong tied to the crate) but still leave the crate door open. If you are in the same room as the crate, do only boring activities that do not involve the puppy. We want them to think the crate is the best option.



Crate training

For crates to be an effective management tool, the puppy needs to feel comfortable and safe and this is built through training.

When to close the crate

You will only start to close the door when the puppy is happily heading into the crate and choosing to stay there for a brief period. Start by picking a time the puppy is likely to go to sleep. Give them a licki mat or something to chew and if they are settled and look like they may doze off, shut the door. If they don't sleep open the door as soon as they look like they may want to come out, try to do it before they start crying. Over time you will slowly increase the period your puppy stays in the crate with the door shut.

If they don't fall asleep, make sure they are occupied, or periodically walk past and casually drop a treat into the crate without comment. Don't go over and talk to them or touch them, this invites interaction and will make you more exciting than remaining in the crate.

My dog doesn't like it

If the pup begins to get upset, open the door. Do not worry, this will not reinforce attention-seeking behaviours. If you respond to the pup's needs quickly enough, they will learn to communicate in ways that are not 'annoying' because they know you will help them when they need it. If the pup was fine before you closed the door, take a step back and continue to build positive associations with the crate.

Remember that not all dogs will find confinement comfortable. If your dog does not seem to be making much progress, reach out for some more detailed assistance.

Nighttime crating

If you plan to crate your dog overnight, be conscious that your crate must be big enough for them to be comfortable and reposition themselves if needed. In the hotter months, dogs can easily feel uncomfortable in crates. As your puppy grows and become accustomed to what is expected of them, you may find that they do not need to be crated all night.

