

Crate Training Your Dog

Crate training is important for all dogs. It is the best way to ensure your dog's safety when you are not around. We recommend either getting a plastic crate (also called an airline carrier) or a collapsible metal crate. If your dog is prone to chewing, you may want to use a metal crate rather than a plastic one. Crates come in different sizes and can be purchased at most pet supply stores. Your dog's crate should be large enough for them to stand up and turn around.

Crate training should be a positive experience that slowly introduces your dog to the crate. Never use the crate as a form of punishment; instead, think of it as a bedroom for your dog. Crate training can take several weeks to complete, so MHHS highly recommends that you begin to crate train before you need it in an emergency situation, so your dog is comfortable being in it.



Step One: Introducing your dog to the crate

- Set up the crate in an area of your house where you will spend a lot of time, such as a living room or bedroom. Put a soft blanket or towel in the crate, making sure your dog won't chew it up when left alone. Introduce your dog to the crate by giving food and praise near it. At this point in the process, we are not expecting the dog to be in the crate or closed inside.
- Over the next few days, begin to encourage your dog to go into the crate with treats or toys. Toss the treat just inside the crate and praise them for stepping inside. Do not force your dog to enter the crate; doing so would create a negative association with the crate in their mind. It could take several days for your dog to be comfortable enough to fully enter the crate.

Step Two: Start closing in

- After introducing your dog to the crate, begin feeding their regular meals near the crate. This will create a pleasant association with the crate. If your dog is comfortable enough to fully enter the crate when you begin step two, put the food dish all the way at the back of the crate. If your dog is still reluctant to enter the crate, put the dish only as far inside as he will readily go without becoming fearful or anxious. Each time you feed them, place the dish a little further back in the crate.
- Once your dog is standing comfortably in the crate to eat their meal, you can close the door while they're eating. At first, open the door as soon as they finish their meal. With each successive feeding, leave the door closed a few minutes longer, building up the time slowly. If your dog whines or cries in the crate, it's imperative that you not let them out until they stop. Otherwise, they will learn that the way to get out of the crate is to whine or cry. Remember to not go too quickly in this step, adding only a minute or two onto each meal until your dog can be in the crate for 15 minutes after a meal without becoming upset.

Step Three: Crating for longer periods of time

- After your dog is eating their regular meals in the crate with no sign of fear or anxiety, you can confine them there for short periods of time while you're home. Call them over to the crate and give them a treat. Give them a short command to enter, such as, "Crate." Encourage them by pointing to the inside of the crate with a treat in your hand. After your dog enters the crate, reward and give them the treat and close the door. Sit quietly near the crate for five to 10 minutes and then go into another room for a few minutes. Return, sit quietly again for a short time, then let them out of the crate.
- Do not make it an emotional experience when your dog is put in or let out of the crate – simply put them in the crate or open the door to the crate and continue your day as you normally would. Excitement for the exit of the crate can build up anxiety of being left alone in it. You want your dog to understand that it is a normal and acceptable thing to be left alone in the crate.
- Repeat this process several times a day. With each repetition, gradually increase the length of time you leave them in the crate and the length of time you're out of sight. Once your dog stays quietly in the crate for about 30 minutes with you out of sight the majority of the time, you can begin leaving them crated when you're gone for short time periods and/or letting them sleep there at night. This could take several days or up to several weeks.
- After your dog is spending about 30 minutes in the crate without becoming anxious or afraid, you can begin leaving them crated for short periods when you leave the house. Put them in the crate using your regular command and a treat. You might also want to leave them with a few safe toys in the crate. Build up to leaving them alone for long stretches of time. Start by leaving them in the crate to go run errands or to a friend's house before you leave them alone for an entire workday.