

CRATE HAVEN

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A Safe Sanctuary / Den



WHAT'S A CRATE?

A crate is an invaluable training tool and a safe place for your dog. Its purpose is to provide security, safety and protection for short-term confinement, while educating a puppy/dog about house boundaries & elimination. Often, the crate becomes a pleasant reprieve for resting. Many dogs feel safe in their crates.

IS IT CRUEL?

No, not if used wisely. The perception of the crate by many is still a “jail cell”. It is natural to perceive a crate this way, if you rely *only* on the visual aspects. Look at the “whole picture” to appreciate the benefits and get to know why dogs (wolves) enjoy dens. Watch dogs, like our Newf, dig holes so they can keep cool and rest.



WHAT IS THE DOG'S PERCEPTION?

A dog's perception is different and varied depending on associations with the crate that usually is made by people like US!

Dogs are den animals by nature. Some prefer sleeping in bed, especially if it makes the owner “happy”. Larger majorities enjoy sleeping curled up in a hole in the ground, or snuggled into a dog bed or blanket. Our dogs make their blankets, kicking up a storm (nesting). They get it just right for their comfort.

With puppies, you can put a few indestructible toys, a blanket, and when hot, an ice cube in a dish. Most people we know, who have either single or multiple dogs, keep crates available and open so that dogs can go there for peace and quiet – throughout the dog's life. Our dogs enjoy their crates in the basement – open door – especially in summer. It's cooler.

If you have more than one dog, or a dog, and then adopt, it's wise to provide a safe place for the new dog, until they become acclimated to their new family and lifestyle.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES

Abundant! If used for overnight confinement and time-outs, dogs can enjoy the privacy of a relaxation retreat. In technical terms, they can avoid the fear, confusion, anxiety, and reaction to punishment for misbehavior while loose. They can escape from children. Young puppies especially need to sleep through-out the day. A schedule is required to teach house-training and the ways of the living with people other than their littermates.

The crate helps to plan schedules for elimination, feeding, playing and exercise. It enables the family to manage what can be a “chaotic” transition of puppy into human household. And, be mindful that puppies are learning all the time. What we do matters (see *Awareness Centered Training – ACT*)

When enhanced with the accessories necessary to satisfy a puppy's delights, such as Kongs, hard rubber toys - and a clip-on water dish, the crate becomes a cozy haven. Again, after 8:00pm, try putting an ice cube in the dish instead of water. You may get to sleep more.

Most of us can enjoy *peace-of-mind*, knowing our pup cannot get into danger or develop bad habits (chewing illegal items). Given busy lifestyles, it safely protects your pup, while leaving you time to get things done or for personal renewal.

LOCATION

Dogs are social animals by nature. Crates should be conveniently located so the pup can enjoy the family social activities: family room, bedroom, kitchen, etc. In the bedroom, the obvious benefit is that pups can't make mistakes and soil carpets/floors. Beyond this, it enables the family to get a peaceful night's sleep, as the pup can see you.

USE vs. ABUSE

Solitary confinement for long periods is psychologically and emotionally cruel for most species.

Crates are not recommended for a dog that must be frequently left alone for extended periods. Other creative ways of housing the dog while you are away are available. You can buy kennels and/or custom build to specific designs and sizes.

For puppies and adolescents, have someone come in the daytime to take them for a walk.

When you arrive home, the dog comes first. S/he should be fed, exercised and allowed **some** supervised freedom in the house. Otherwise, the dog will never learn how to behave within the family system.

Crating for long periods has a negative impact on socialization and learning. This is true for all species, and should be avoided. Dogs need stimulation, and because they are social animals, should not be left alone for long periods. A lonely dog that craves companionship will find ways to express anxiety, depression and stress. They will become destructive. There are better ways to balance their energy with enrichment and exercise.

HOW TO INTRODUCE THE CRATE

Gradually and joyfully! The association should be a positive experience. Add a cue like "go to your crate" in a pleasant voice. Toss a treat, toy or stuffed Kong into the crate. Have a scented blanket for puppies. Like a dognapper or blanket in the family room, teach a "target" place like Bed or Crate.

If a dog is introduced to a crate early, and in a pleasant way, they usually will accept future confinements.

As previously mentioned, place one or two hard rubber toys (Kongs, Cowbones, Gumabones) in the crate, along with a water dish attached to the side (if you plan on longer confinements). At night, withhold water after 8:00pm. An ice cube will suffice on hot summer nights. Most dogs will be fine without water until morning. You will get more sleep. Did I mention more sleep?

HOT TIP: Feed a few healthy treats to the pup and praise generously. If they approach the crate or dognapper on their own, this is time to SHAPE THAT BEHAVIOR WITH PRAISE. Toss them a treat – GOOD PUPPY.

Let them know that going to their crate is the cat's meow. Try not to call the pup to the crate. This will create an association that approaching you means, "crate time". It could work positively or negatively, but isn't worth blowing the whole process over. If the pup loves the crate, it's positive. If they associate that crate to any negative experience, they may connect it to your calling them to the crate.

HOW TO USE THE CRATE

Crates should never be used for punishment. Time-outs are fine, without anger. Neutrally escort your dog to the crate, especially if YOU need a brain break.

If plunged into their crates unwillingly, after an "incident", a pup will soon learn that one, having an "incident" gets attention, and two, they get thrown in "that place". They will learn to improvise incidents to get attention and dislike the mention of a crate.

Adolescents, with energy to spare, need exercise before being confined to crates. Give them an opportunity to channel that energy into something positive like retrieving the ball. The mantra (see *Doggy*

Diner) is “You do something for me, and I’ll do something for you.” If you feed your dog 2X a day, you have 14 training opportunities a week to teach basic, valuable behaviors (watch-me, sit, down, come, gentle).

WHAT SIZE CRATE

A crate should be large enough to permit any age dog to *stretch* on her side without being cramped. It is wise to anticipate growth rates for economical reasons. You don’t want the crate too big, but big enough to last through growth spurts. The dog should be able to stand without hitting her head and *turnaround* *without dislocating vertebrae*.

WILL ALL DOGS ACCEPT THE CRATE

No, but it is used successfully by most dog owners- and accepted by most dogs. If a dog has suffered a traumatic experience with a crate, or is an inadaptible “senior” dog, you may have to use your creativity to devise another approach of confinement.

In summary, begin with short confinements, than extend them, slowly desensitizing the pup/dog to the environment and idea of being crated.

Remember; locate the crate so they can see the environment and family members. They need to be able to observe activities and take in the vista of sights, sounds and smells.

Make all connections with the crate neutral or pleasant. For example, the puppy is driving you crazy while trying to finish a task. Take the pup out to eliminate. Gently guide the pup to the crate with a toy and a treat. Be assertive, but gentle.

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In essence, a crate must be perceived by the pup or adult dog as a temporary retreat. This is their spa for relaxation, personal renewal, to dream, or to lay back and enjoy the scenery. Create a happy, healthy confident dog by teaching with awareness, balance, relationship and always considering their well-being.

Enjoy the Journey!