

Crate Aversion Solutions

Mistakes That Make a Crate Aversive:

- Forcing a pup to go inside a crate when he doesn't want to.
- Having a crate that is too small for a large pup so that he is physically restricted.
- Having a bleak interior to the crate (no blankets, no toys, and no treats).
- Leaving the pup in the crate for too long at a stretch or for too long over a 24-hour cycle.
- Using the crate as a place of punishment ("time out" in the crate).

The Result of Crate Aversion

If a crate has been rendered aversive to a pup by any one of the means listed above, he will not want to go inside it, will complain when confined, and may injure himself in frantic attempts to escape. In addition, a pup that is confined in a crate too long may be forced to urinate or defecate inside it. Once the sanctity of the crate is defiled in this way, it may no longer be a useful tool for housetraining. Pups can't tell you if you are doing something to them that they vehemently deplore, so instead they act out their grief. The behaviours we see in crate-aversive dogs are, to owners, crate-training problems. They are:

- Pups acting aggressively, nipping or biting as you try and shove them into the crate.
- Protest barking after you have shut the door, or may scratch frantically in futile attempts to escape.
- Biting the door of the cage in angst.

More passive dogs, rather than acting out in the ways listed above, internalize and displace their thwarted emotions by either a) licking either the inside of the crate or themselves, b) turning in small circles within the crate (if space allows) or c) eating their own excreta.

All these problems appear to be diverse but, in fact, are all caused by the fact that the pup was not properly acclimated to its crate or that the crate was abused by the pup's owner, rendering it aversive to the pup.

The Solution

As usual, prevention is better than cure, but the way forward is similar in both instances:

- Make the crate a comfortable and cozy place with padded bedding for the dog to lie on. Use bumpers around the side of the crate for the pup to lean on, and place a cover over the top if the crate is made of wire to add that den-like dimension.
- Make sure the crate is large enough for the dog to be able to stand up and wide enough for him to be able to turn around.
- Feed the pup progressively closer to the open door of the crate, eventually putting the food bowl just inside the crate so that he has to put his head and shoulders inside to eat.

- Hide food treats under the padding of the crate and enrich the interior with favourite chew toys.
- Once the pup has overcome its immediate fear of being near the crate, you can try confining him for short periods of time, say, 5 minutes, immediately after he has finished a burst of highly energetic play and is due to rest. Stay with him and talk to him so he knows he is not alone.
- Slowly increase the time for which the pup can be enclosed in the crate from 5 to 15 minutes but stay with him and/or have the crate in the same room (15 minutes is a useful period of time to confine the pup for housetraining following an unsuccessful outside "bathroom run").

At all other times the crate door should be open and the crate should be enriched in the way described so the pup is free to come and go as he pleases.

Location of Crate

Whenever possible, place the crate near or next to you when you are home. This will encourage the pup to go inside it without his feeling lonely or isolated when you go out. A central room in the apartment (i.e.: living room or kitchen) or a large hallway near the entrance is a good place to crate your puppy.

Introducing the Crate to Your Puppy

In order that your puppy associate his/her kennel crate with comfort, security and enjoyment, please follow these guidelines:

- Occasionally throughout the day, drop small pieces of kibble or dog biscuits in the crate. While investigating his new crate, the pup will discover edible treasures, thereby reinforcing his positive associations with the crate. You may also feed him in the crate to create the same effect. If the dog hesitates, it often works to feed him in front of the crate, then right inside the doorway and then, finally, in the back of the crate.
- In the beginning, praise and pet your pup when he enters. Do not try to push, pull or force the puppy into the crate. At this early stage of introduction only inductive methods are suggested. Overnight exception: You may need to place your pup in his crate and shut the door upon retiring. (In most cases, the crate should be placed next to your bed overnight. If this is not possible, the crate can be placed in the kitchen, bathroom or living room.)
- You may also play this enjoyable and educational game with your pup or dog: without alerting your puppy, drop a small dog biscuit into the crate. Then call your puppy and say to him, "Where's the biscuit? It's in your room." Using only a friendly, encouraging voice, direct your pup toward his crate. When the puppy discovers the treat, give enthusiastic praise. The biscuit will automatically serve as a primary reward. Your pup should be free to leave its crate at all times during this game. Later on, your puppy's toy or ball can be substituted for the treat.
- It is advisable first to crate your pup for short periods of time **while you are home with him**. In fact, crate training is best accomplished while you are in the room with your dog. Getting him used to your absence from the room in which he

is crated is a good first step. This prevents an association being made with the crate and your leaving him/her alone.

Barking In the Crate

In most cases a pup who cries incessantly in his crate has either been crated too soon (without taking the proper steps as outlined above) or is suffering from separation anxiety and is anxious about being left alone. Some pups may simply be under exercised. Others may not have enough attention paid them. Some breeds of dog may be particularly vocal (e.g., Miniature Pinchers, Mini Schnauzers, and other frisky terrier types). These dogs may need the "Alternate Method of Confining Your Dog", along with increasing the amount of exercise and play your dog receives daily.

Alternative Method of Confining Your Puppy

There are alternative methods to crating very young puppies and puppies that must be left alone in the house for lengths of time exceeding the recommended maximum duration of confinement (see Crating Duration Guidelines). We suggest the following:

- Use a small to medium-sized room space such as a kitchen, large bathroom or hallway with non-porous floor. Set up the crate on one end, the food and water a few feet away, and some newspaper (approx. 2'x3' to 3'x3') using a 3 to 4 layer thickness, several feet away. Confine your puppy to this room or area using a 3 ft. high, safety-approved child's gate rather than shutting off the opening by a solid door. Your pup will feel less isolated if it can see out beyond its immediate place of confinement. Puppy proof the area by removing any dangerous objects or substances.

Another Method

Start off by placing blankets and maybe something with your scent on it inside the crate. Next leave the door open and let her investigate it on her own. After she has checked it out, place some treats inside and let her find them. Once she starts to become comfortable with the crate start to close the door. Start with just a few seconds and lengthen the time as she accepts it. Just be patient and take your time, get a routine and stick to it.

You could also try playing a game with your puppy by squeaking a squeaky toy and placing inside the crate, close the door and she should be begging you to let her in to get it. After a second of begging, let her inside, close the door. After a few minutes, let her out.

After she has adjusted to the crate, now it's time to let her alone. Try walking away for about 3-5 minutes. If she starts crying, ignore her till she is quiet. Once she stops whining, let her out and praise her for being quiet.