



# Step by Step Guide to Crate Training

## WHY IS CRATE TRAINING IMPORTANT?

Crate training provides a safe sanctuary for a dog and can aid in shaping desirable behaviors while preventing destructive or unwanted behaviors. In addition, crate training can help reduce separation anxiety, make travel easier, and ensure safety during unsupervised times.

## THE STEPS

### Step 1: “Treat Fairy”

- Toss a treat or two in the crate and allow your dog to enter on their own without any pressure. Do this a few times a day, if possible.
- This allows for freedom of investigation, without force, making it a fun place where treats fall from the sky.

### Step 2: Mealtimes in the crate

- Place the bowl in front of the crate to start if your dog is extremely nervous to enter.
- Every 1-2 days, move the bowl further into the crate by a few inches until he/she is fully in the crate with food in the back. Take this step slower if two days are too quick for advancement.

### Step 3: Start closing the crate door during mealtimes

- Lock the crate as your dog eats.
- Let your dog go out right after finishing the meal.

### Step 4: Work on building duration

- Continue as many meals as possible in the crate. Use Kongs, lick mats, food scatter, puzzles, and/or other items to make the meal last longer.
- Keep them in the crate for several minutes after the meal and add a few minutes each time.

### Step 5: Continue building duration

- Try walking away from the crate during regular daily chores/tasks.
- Offer long-lasting bones, chews, and treats.
- Start using the crate for “breaks” outside of normal mealtimes.

### Step 6: When to use the crate

- When you leave home
- Overnight
- To decompress your dog when they get overstimulated

## EXTRA TIPS

- **Crates can be used for “timeout” but should never be treated as a punishment** - your intention when crating your dog will set the tone.
  - » Timeout - You need a break, so you put your dog in the crate with a long-lasting bone and go about your activities. Maybe they are getting into stuff, barking a lot, or begging, which makes you frustrated, so you crate them calmly to get that break.

- » Punishment – Scolding, dragging by the collar, shoving a dog into the crate, hitting/kicking the crate are all examples of what **not** to do. This will make a dog fear you as well as the crate much more.
- **Some dogs like a cover over the crate.** If you do cover, leave a few inches gap from the bottom so they can look out while laying down. This provides some visibility in a calmer body position, typically leading to better crate success.
- **Try different types of crates.**
  - » Wire crates offer a log of visibility and are easiest to escape from.
  - » Plastic (Airline) Crates offer lower visibility and tend to be more secure.
  - » Wooden furniture crates are prettier, more expensive, and easy to chew.
  - » Soft travel crates are easy to escape from and are only recommended for dogs that are already comfortable in crates.
  - » Military dog crates are heavy duty and harder to escape but may run a risk of injury.
  - » Kennel runs are large metal enclosures, which may be best for very large or small space sensitive dogs.
- **Try moving your crate to different parts of the house.** Some dogs need a dark, quiet room away from everything, while others like to observe all the action.
- **Try a fan or sound machine (not directed towards the dog) to drown out some other noises.** Reggae music is proven to be the most calming music for dogs.
- **Always treat your dog when they enter their crate.** It doesn't matter if they were there 10 minutes ago or are only going to be in for 10 minutes. This will reinforce a positive association with the crate.
- **Only let them out with quiet and calm behavior.** If they are only vocalizing, pawing, or nosing the crate a little, walk calmly to the crate, wait for quiet and calm behavior, then let them out. You can ask for a sit, wait, down, or any other easier behaviors to encourage a calmer exit.
- **Don't reinforce trauma.** If your dog is panicking (biting wires, excessive drooling, spinning, slamming their body into the side), get them out immediately. Some dogs are happiest and safest when just left to roam freely in the house and to sleep on the couch. Not every dog needs to be crated. If your pet has severe negative reactions to a crate, a dog trainer and/or veterinarian can help you determine if crate training is critical for your dog and your lifestyle.
- **Use calming remedies if needed.** Try Adaptil (DAP) diffusers, Rescue Remedy, calming treats, pheromone collars, and other natural ways to help settle a dog who isn't doing well.
- **Try a larger or smaller crate.** Sometimes dogs enjoy a little more room to spread out or smaller space to curl up.
- **Use an alternative to crates.** Play pens, laundry rooms, baby gating to contain your dog into certain areas of the house are all good alternatives for extra-large dogs, and dogs with small space issues.

## QUESTIONS?

Contact the HSSW Dog Training Team at [dogtraining@southwesthumane.org](mailto:dogtraining@southwesthumane.org) or visit [hssw.org/training](https://hssw.org/training).