

Crate Training

Every puppy needs to learn the skill of resting calmly in a crate. This skill will be needed at the veterinary hospital, for traveling, and for restricted activity due to illness. It's also a lifesaver for many young dogs during the destructive chewing stage that starts at several months of age and can last until age 2 to 3 years in some breeds.

After a dog has become trained and reliable in the house, the crate will often be needed only for specific reasons rather than everyday use. One critical situation that can call for bringing out the crate again is separation anxiety. The ability to relax in a crate can save a dog's life during this crisis.

Usually it works best to crate the puppy in your bedroom when you're sleeping. If you want the dog to share your bed, wait until the adult temperament emerges. Then if it turns out the temperament is not suited to bed privileges, you will not have the difficult job of teaching the dog to stay off the bed.

Teaching a puppy to stay off the bed from the beginning is much easier, both for you and for the pup.

People tend to make the mistake of giving the puppy attention for making noise in the crate. When you do this, you confirm the puppy's instinct that being alone is death (it would be, in the wild), and that calling for help will bring someone. Having the crate in your bedroom for sleeping tends to help because the puppy can hear, smell and possibly see you. Not being alone, the puppy usually finds it easier to get used to the crate. Your sleeping helps set the scene for the puppy to sleep, too.

Keep the puppy on a good schedule of food, water and outings so the puppy's body will have the best chance of making it through the night without a bathroom break. If the pup does need a break, make it very low-key with dim lights and soft voices and no playtime. If you completely avoid going to the puppy when the puppy is making noise, problems usually pass quickly. But make no mistake, lost sleep comes with the puppy-adoption territory! Don't miss the chance to start your puppy off right, or you will lose a lot more sleep over a longer period of time, because crate-training will take much longer. The worst thing to do is let the puppy yell for a long time, and then go to the puppy. Doing that teaches the puppy to persistently make noise in the crate. It communicates to the pup that you want to be notified with lots and lots of noise! It also causes the puppy enormous stress that can become a lifelong response to being confined in a crate. Adult dogs in this stressed state can break out of crates and badly injure themselves. This is not the future you want for your puppy.

What you want the puppy to discover is that nothing bad happens from being alone in a crate. You also want the puppy to learn that it's okay to let you know of a need, but you will not come in response to loud racket. Check on the puppy after the puppy has become quiet again.

If your puppy isn't making it through the night without a potty break, schedule it so that the puppy doesn't have to wake you up and ask. Realize, too, that the puppy's body will awaken and need to potty whenever someone in the household gets up. That person or someone else will need to give the pup a potty break.

Don't trick a puppy about the crate. Give a treat when the pup goes in, but don't be sneaky about shutting the door. Don't put the puppy into the crate when the puppy is sound asleep, to wake up trapped in a crate. That can cause the puppy to distrust both you and the crate.

Be careful not to abuse the crate. When you are at home and awake, supervise the puppy in person rather than using the crate. Puppies need exercise, mental stimulation and guidance from you in order

to grow up healthy and happy. Too much crate time is not humane. Puppies sleep 14 hours a day or so. If the crate time is scheduled so the pup can use it for sleeping, that's ideal.

Make the crate a pleasant place to rest. A few safe chew toys and a treat can help the puppy relax and drift off to dreamland. Everyone in the household can sleep better with a crate-trained puppy.

THE CANINE BEHAVIOR SERIES

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House Training

How long will it take to houstrain my puppy?

All it requires are a few basic rules to house-train puppies within a short amount of time, sometimes as little as a few days to a few weeks. This does not mean that the puppy will be able to be trusted to wander throughout the home without eliminating. What the puppy should quickly learn is where it should eliminate, and the consequences of eliminating indoors when the owner is supervising. However, anytime your puppy is unsupervised and eliminates indoors, this can further delay successful houstraining since the puppy will have learned that there are alternate indoor elimination areas that can be used without untoward consequence.

The goal of houstraining is to encourage and reinforce desirable elimination. Do not focus on trying to teach your puppy where it is not allowed to eliminate, as there are literally hundreds of locations in your home where your puppy might have to be deterred.

What site should I choose?

It is advisable to select a site that has an easy and direct access to the outdoors. Puppies may more easily learn where to eliminate if a single location is used. Over time, the location, the substrate (surface underfoot) and the small amounts of residual odor help to establish a more regular habit of returning to the area. If you do not have immediate access to the outdoors (e.g. high rise living) or if your schedule requires that you leave your pet longer than it can control itself, you might need to train your pet to an indoor litter area. If this is your best option, you can follow the same procedures outlined below, but will instead take your pet to its litter area, rather than to the outdoors. Paper training, discussed below, is another option. However, it may be more difficult to train your pet to eliminate at one site (e.g. indoor litter) and also expect it to eliminate in other sites (e.g. outdoors).

How do I houstrain my puppy?

To houstrain a puppy quickly and efficiently, follow the steps below:

1. Puppies have a strong urge to eliminate after sleeping, playing, feeding and drinking. Take your puppy to its selected elimination area within 30 minutes of each of these activities. In addition, although some puppies can control themselves through the entire night, most puppies need to eliminate every 3 to 4 hours during the daytime. With each passing month, you can expect your puppy to control itself a little longer between elimination times. The puppy

should be taken to its elimination area, given a word or two of verbal encouragement (e.g. 'Hurry up') and as soon as elimination is completed, lavishly praised and patted. A few tasty food treats can also be given the first few times the puppy eliminates in the right spot, and then intermittently thereafter. This teaches the puppy the proper place to eliminate, and that elimination in that location is associated with rewards. Some puppies may learn to eliminate when they hear the cue words ('Hurry up').

2. If you take your puppy to the elimination site and your puppy is only interested in playing and investigating the environment, take the puppy indoors after about 10 minutes and strictly supervise him until you can try again, approximately each half hour. Always accompany your puppy outdoors so that you can be certain that it has eliminated. When you first start house training, be certain to reward elimination immediately upon completion and not when the puppy comes back indoors.
3. When indoors, your puppy must be supervised so that you can see when it needs to eliminate and immediately take it outdoors to its elimination area. One of the best techniques is to leave a remote lead attached. Should pre-elimination signs (circling, squatting, sneaking-off, heading to the door) occur, immediately take the dog to its elimination site, give the cue words, and reward the puppy when it eliminates. If the puppy begins to eliminate indoors you must be supervising so that you can immediately interrupt the behavior, such as with a verbal reprimand or shaker can.

Then take the puppy outdoors to complete elimination at the proper site. Rather than use punishment to deter undesirable elimination, the goal is to train the puppy where to eliminate through supervision and rewards. Watch the puppy closely for signs it needs to eliminate and soon the puppy will learn to exhibit these signs to get your attention that it needs to go outdoors.

4. When you are not available to supervise, the puppy should be confined to its confinement area. Be certain that your puppy has eliminated, and has had sufficient play and exercise before any lengthy confinement. Establish a daily routine that helps your puppy learn when it is time to play, eat, exercise, sleep, and eliminate. If the confinement area is small enough, such as a pen or crate, many puppies will have sufficient control to keep this area clean. This means that when you come to release the puppy from confinement, it must be taken directly to its elimination area. Puppies will generally avoid soiling their crate if they use their crates as a sleeping or play area. However, puppies that are anxious or distressed about being confined to the crate are likely to soil. In addition, if the area is too large the puppy may soil in a portion of the confinement area. If the puppy needs to be left for longer than it can control itself, it should be confined to a small room or pen where paper is spread over the floor for elimination except for a corner that contains the puppy's bed and feeding area. Once the puppy starts to limit its elimination to some selected areas of the paper, unused areas can be taken up. For owners that intend to continue to use paper for training, the puppy should be supervised when released from confinement, and returned to the paper (and reinforced) for elimination.

Why does my puppy refuse to eliminate in my presence, even when outdoors?

Puppies that are disciplined and punished for indoor elimination rather than reinforced for outdoor elimination may soon begin to fear to eliminate whenever you are present, regardless of the location. These puppies do not associate the punishment with indoor elimination; they associate the punishment with the presence of the owners. For some puppies, standing quietly off to the side may allow them time to eliminate. It is best if you can be close by, but each puppy is an individual and some may need more space than others before feeling comfortable enough to eliminate.

What do I do if I find some stool or urine in an inappropriate spot?

There is no point in punishing or even pointing out the problem to the puppy. Only if the puppy is in the act of elimination will it understand the consequences (rewards or punishment). In fact, it is not the puppy that has erred; it is the owner who has erred by not properly supervising. Put the puppy elsewhere, clean up the mess and vow to supervise the puppy more closely in the future.

How can I teach my puppy to signal that it needs to go out to eliminate?

By regularly taking the dog outdoors, through the same door, to the same site, and providing rewards for proper elimination, the puppy should soon learn to head for the door each time it has to eliminate. If you recognize the signs of impending elimination and praise the puppy whenever it heads for the doorway, the behavior can be further encouraged. Puppies that have been interrupted or reprimanded on one or more occasions as they begin to eliminate indoors, may begin to try to sneak away, whine or show some form of anxiety when they feel the urge to eliminate but cannot escape from the owner's sight. If you can pick up on these cues, and take the puppy directly to the outdoors for elimination and reward, the puppy may consistently begin to show these signals when he or she needs to eliminate, and may even begin to take you to the exit door.

Further into the process, some puppies can be taught to ring a bell or bark to let you know it needs to go outside to eliminate. For either of these to be effective, you first must constantly supervise your puppy so you can see the signs of a full bladder or bowel (restlessness, agitation) and quickly take them to the exit location, ring the bell or get them to bark and go outside. Over time the puppy should learn that the signal would get the door open. However, do not rely on signaling until it reliably happens or the puppy will end up eliminating indoors instead.

When will I be able to trust my puppy to wander loose throughout the home?

Generally you will want your dog to have been error free around the house for about a month before you can begin to decrease your confinement and supervision. The first time you leave the puppy unsupervised should be just after taking the dog outdoors for elimination. Gradually increase the length of time that your dog is allowed to roam through the home without supervision while you are home. If the dog has been able to go unsupervised for a couple of hours without an "accident", it might then be possible to begin going out for short periods of time. Of course, if the dog still investigates and chews, then confinement and supervision may still be necessary.

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