



Successful crate training

Written by Jamie Flanders



Top 5 reasons it's important that your puppy learns to love being crated or kenneled.

1. **Errorless house training.** Short-term (crate) and long-term (exercise pen) confinement areas along with a consistent house training routine sets your puppy up for success. See the house training handout to learn more.
2. **Errorless chew training.** Place safe and appropriate chews and toys in your puppy's short-term and long-term confinement areas to help them build a preference for chewing their toys rather than your belongings.
3. **Vet and groomer.** At some point in your puppy's life they will need to be crated or kenneled for veterinary visits or grooming. Being in an unfamiliar environment away from you is a stressful event, teaching your puppy to love being crated or kenneled can help ease the stress in these situations.
4. **Travel.** Puppies and dogs need to be crated when traveling on a plane. Crash tested canine seatbelt harnesses are recommended for traveling by car or truck.
5. **New environments.** Dogs are contextual learners. Your puppy is house trained and chew trained to your home. If you take your puppy to a friend or family members home, your puppy should be crated with a safe toy such as a stuffed Kong when not being actively supervised. Furthermore, new environments can be stressful, the crate can become a familiar safe place to retreat to if needed.

Teaching your puppy to love the crate

There are many great ways to teach a puppy to love their crate. This is one.

Phase 1 – Door off or tied open

1. Never force your puppy into the crate.
2. Keep the door off or tied back so it can't accidentally scare your puppy by shutting them in too soon.
3. Place treats around and inside the crate. Allow your puppy to investigate and find the treats on their own. Do not attempt to persuade or coax your puppy to find the treats or get into the crate. This may cause your puppy to become suspicious of the crate.
4. Drop treats in the crate when your puppy walks inside. If your puppy comes out for more treats, walk away until they go back in.
5. Tie a chew or tether a stuffed Kong to the back of the crate so your puppy must go inside and lay down to chew it.
6. Feed your puppy exclusively inside the crate.
7. When your puppy can confidently walk in and out of the crate on their own you can move to phase 2.

Phase 2- Kennel up on cue

1. **Lure.** Take a treat in your hand, put it to your puppy's nose and lure your puppy inside the crate. When your puppy is fully inside say YES and then drop the treat on the floor



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of the crate. When your puppy is easily following your lure into the crate (5 out of 5 times) you can move to the next step.

2. **Hand signal.** Pretend to have a treat in your hand and lure your puppy into the crate, when your puppy is fully inside the crate say YES and drop a treat on the floor of the crate with your opposite hand. Repeat this process until your puppy can confidently follow your hand signal into the crate (5 out of 5 times) and then move to the next step. If your puppy can not follow your hand signal into the crate, go back to step one for a few more repetitions before trying step 2 again.
3. **Verbal cue.** Say “crate” or “kennel” and then use your hand signal (remember, no treat in your signal hand) to direct your puppy into the crate. When your puppy is fully inside the crate say YES and then drop a treat on the floor of the crate with your opposite hand. It is important that you say “crate” before you move your hand otherwise your puppy will be too distracted by the movement of your hand and won’t hear your verbal cue. Repeat this until your puppy is going into the crate with your verbal cue (5 out of 5 times).

Phase 3 – Adding an exit cue and duration

1. **Exit cue.** Cue your puppy to go into the crate, when your puppy is in the crate drop a treat on the floor at the back of the crate, after they eat the treat and before they exit the crate, give them a cue that means you can get out now such as, “exit” or “out”. Praise your puppy when they exit the crate.
2. **Duration.** Cue your puppy to go into the crate, when your puppy is in the crate drop a treat at the back of the crate, after your puppy eats the treat and before they exit the crate drop another treat at the back of the crate. Repeat this a few times before cuing your puppy to exit the crate. During each session gradually add more time between treats so that your puppy must stay inside the crate for longer and longer before a treat is dropped.

Phase 4 – Closing the door

1. Cue your puppy to get into the crate, when your puppy is in the crate drop a handful of treats at the back of the crate. While your puppy is eating the treats close the crate door. When your puppy comes to the door drop another treat at the back of the crate. Repeat this a few times before saying “exit” and then opening the crate door. It’s important that you say “exit” before you open the door, otherwise the door will be the cue for your puppy to get out.
2. When your puppy knows how to sit, you can cue them to “sit” before you open the door and say “exit”. If your puppy gets up or tries to exit the crate prematurely, simply close the door (without smashing or scaring your puppy) remind them to sit, and try again.