



House Paws Home Veterinary Care
(651) 283-7216
housepawsmn@gmail.com

FAQs: Crate Training

The following document outlines several frequently asked questions of pet owners with new dogs. If you have any further questions or concerns, feel free to contact us.

WHY DO DOGS NEED TO BE CONFINED?

Dogs are very social animals that make wonderful pets. They can be effective as watchdogs, and they are excellent companions for play and exercise. Dogs are also sources of affection and comfort. With the busy lifestyle of most families, dogs must learn to spend much of the day at home while their family is away at school, work or recreational activities. During those times that you are away and cannot supervise your pet, your pet may still feel the need to chew, play, explore, eat or eliminate.

HOW CAN THIS MISBEHAVIOR BE PREVENTED?

To prevent inappropriate behaviors by your pet when you are gone, you will need to form a schedule. This will ensure that your pet has the opportunity to play, eat and eliminate before you leave it in a confined area or kennel. Confining your pet will keep it secure and safe and prevent any damage to your possessions or to your pet itself.

WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS FOR CONFINEMENT?

Depending on your home, it may be possible to dog-proof your house or apartment by closing a few doors or putting up some child gates/barricades. The dog may then be allowed to access the remainder of the home. Another option is to use avoidance devices that keep your pet away from select areas using motion detectors, citronella spray collars, etc. If this dog-proofing is not possible when you have to leave, confine the dog to a single room, pen or crate. The smaller confinement area provides safety for your dog and protects your home from damage. It also teaches your dog what it is allowed to chew, and where it is allowed to eliminate.

BUT ISN'T CRATE TRAINING CRUEL?

Crate training provides safety for your pet and prevents damage to your home. A crate also gives your pet a place of security and a comfortable retreat where the dog can relax, sleep or chew on a favorite toy. Behavior problems can be prevented by confining the pet to a crate or room when the owner is not available to supervise. When you are home, supervision and rewards may be used to prevent inappropriate behavior and to teach your dog where to eliminate, what to chew and what rooms or areas are "out of bounds."

WILL CONFINEMENT HELP WITH HOUSE -TRAINING?

Crate training is one of the quickest and most effective ways to house-train a dog! Most dogs instinctively avoid eliminating in their sleeping and eating areas, and dogs that use a crate as their bed will seldom eliminate inside unless they have been left in the crate for too long. Crate training can also help teach a dog to develop control over its elimination.

As soon as your dog is released from its crate, take it to a designated area and reward elimination in acceptable locations. The crate prevents chewing, digging and elimination in the owner's home, so owners of crate-trained puppies have fewer behavior concerns. Crate-trained puppies receive less discipline and punishment, which improves the relationship between the pet and its owner.

WILL THE CRATE PROVOKE BARKING?

The crate is often a useful way to reduce or prevent distress barking. Instead of locking up a puppy in an area separate from owners at night time or during meals, the puppy may be placed in a crate in the bedroom or kitchen. The puppy cannot get into mischief and is less likely to vocalize if the owners are in the same room. If the puppy is locked away in an area with no access to its owners, distress vocalization is much more likely. If the owner goes to the puppy to quiet it down or check on it, the puppy views its crying behavior as being rewarded.



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HOW DOES CAGING WORK WITH TRAVEL?

The dog may require crate confinement at times during travel or boarding. Dogs that are familiar with caging are more likely to feel secure and less stressed if caging is ever required.

WHAT TYPE OF CRATE OR CONFINEMENT AREA WORKS BEST?

A metal, collapsible crate with a tray floor often works well, as long as the crate is large enough for the dog to stand, turn and stretch. Some dogs may feel more secure if a blanket is draped over the crate. A plastic traveling crate or a homemade crate may also be used. Playpens or barricades are sometimes successful, as long as they are indestructible and escape-proof.

WHERE SHOULD THE CAGE BE LOCATED?

Dogs are social animals, so the ideal location for the crate is a room where the family spends a lot of time. Examples include the kitchen, living room or bedroom. These locations are often more ideal than an isolated area such as a laundry room.

HOW CAN CONFINEMENT BECOME A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE?

Many dogs quickly choose a small area, such as the corner of a room, a dog bed or by a couch, where they go to relax. You can make the crate your dog's favorite retreat and sleeping area by associating the crate with positive and relaxing experiences and stimuli (eg. food, treats, chew toys, beds). Place the dog in its confinement area only during times of

scheduled rest or sleep. You will need to be aware of the dog's schedule and its needs for exploration, play, food and elimination so that the dog is only placed in its cage when all of its needs are fulfilled. Your dog must be released from its cage before the next exercise, feeding or elimination period.

A radio or television playing in the background may help to calm the dog when it is alone in its confinement area, especially during the daytime. These may also help to mask any environmental stimuli that could cause the dog to vocalize.

The crate should never be used as punishment!

IS CRATE TRAINING PRACTICAL FOR ALL DOGS?

Some dogs do not tolerate crate training and may show anxiety or continue to eliminate when confined. These dogs often adapt better to different types of confinement like pens, small rooms or barricaded areas. If a dog is left alone for longer than it can control its elimination, it will be necessary to provide an area larger than a cage so that the pet does not have to eliminate near its food and bedding.

Continued anxiety, destruction or vocalization when placed in the crate may indicate separation anxiety. A behavior intervention may be needed in these cases.



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