

Crate Training

Have you ever noticed how many dogs choose to sleep under something like a table, or curled up in a ball with their shoulder bolstered into a corner? This is because dogs are, by nature, **den animals**. Crates can be an excellent way to provide a den for your dog – a safe, quiet place to “turn off” and have a break from light, sound and stimuli. Because a crate is an artificial den, it may take some training to help your dog recognize it as a safe comfortable place to seek refuge.

A VERY helpful tool for crate training is having a classically conditioned marker – like a clicker – so that you can mark moments when your dog is being calm in the crate from a distance, even when you’re out of the room. This is a tool that should be developed with a trainer.

Some suggestions to consider when purchasing a crate:

- Remember that first and foremost the crate is a den – it should not be an expansive space – but rather, just large enough for your dog to stand up, turn around in and lay comfortably in – it should **not** be large enough for you dog to “potty” in or run circles in.

***This can be a tough concept for humans, as we tend to be claustrophobic and the idea of being in a crate of any size is upsetting – remember, dogs see the world very differently from us, and a snug, cozy den, when introduced properly, can provide security and comfort.



The image on the left shows an appropriately sized crate for this dog, the image on the right shows a crate FAR too large for the puppy, but demonstrates how a divider can be used to accommodate a small dog/pup in a large crate that he may (or may not) grow into.

Choosing a Crate

- There are many different kinds of dog crates: soft/fabric, wire/metal, and hard plastic/airline crates.
- The safest crate for most any dog to be left home alone in is a hard plastic/airline crate. Not only does this provide the most authentic den experience, it has proven to be challenging to escape from and is least likely to injure your dog if they panic and try to escape. These hard plastic/airline crates come with either two finger squeeze latches or a dial latch – both are very secure, however the dial latch is recommended for the determined escape artist.



Hard Plastic/Airline Crate – The best choice for dogs with separation anxiety, escape tendencies or those being “house trained”.



Wire Crate – NOT recommended for dogs with Separation Anxiety or strong escape tendencies, but works well for “house/potty training”. Wire crates are more portable/storable than Hard Plastic/Airline crates.



Soft Crate – NOT recommended for use with puppies, chewers, dogs with separation anxiety or tendency to escape. Soft Crates are ideal for adult dogs who are already crate trained and are great for travel in the car or camping trips.

Introducing the Crate

The crate should be located in a quiet, well ventilated, low traffic part of the home. A bedroom, or the family room (if not too high traffic or noisy) are good places to consider. Think about a place where you would want to unwind at the end of a hectic day.

Ideally, all dogs would be introduced to the crate as young puppies, but the principles are fundamentally the same when introducing the crate to any dog, regardless of age or previous experiences. However, remember there is no magic bullet to training of any kind.

1. Begin by feeding all meals in the crate with the **door open**. Measure out the amount of food your dog is fed each day and spread it out over several scheduled meals (2-4) throughout the day. Put the food dish towards the back of the crate so that your dog must walk all the way in by him/herself to eat the meal – remember to leave the door open! If your dog has a strong aversion to the crate and chooses to ignore the meal to avoid going in the crate, add a little something extra yummy to the meal and leave the food in there for 30 minutes, giving the dog plenty of time to make up their mind. If they choose not to enter the crate to eat during the 30 minutes, then remove food and DO NOT feed the dog until the next scheduled feeding. Do not worry about them missing a few meals (even if they're a puppy) – they will eat when they are hungry.
 - a. If your dog is completely ok with going into the crate to eat their meals, you may also periodically toss a few treats or toys into the crate throughout the day, allowing them to go in and out freely.
 - b. Hide bits of food and/or toys in the crate (under a mat or towel) when they aren't looking so when they do go in, they'll find a surprise.
2. Once your dog is comfortable coming and going from the crate with the door left open (this could be in a matter of 1-2 days, or weeks for some dogs), you may begin to calmly and nonchalantly close the door while they are inside for short periods of time at first – just a few moments without latching it, working up to several minutes with it latched (it is important that your dog is accustomed to the odd sound of the latch opening and closing) Toss treats through the openings in the BACK (not through the door) of the crate if your dog is calm and relaxed. If your dog becomes anxious, wait for them to settle, then toss a treat in the back and open the door. Teach them that being calm in the crate is the only way to get the door to open.

3. Teach them not to bolt out of the door when it opens: Open the door just a little ways – if they make a move, close it quickly again to prevent escape (do not worry if you bump them on the nose when shutting the door quickly) – wait for them to sit, or relax, then re-open the door quickly and repeat until the dog chooses to wait for you to call them out (vs. just assuming they may bolt out).
 - a. This is a process that does require some technique – please consider using ADOPTION FOLLOW UP assistance to learn more about this exercise if your dog tends to bolt out of the crate.

4. **Before** ever leaving your dog crated while you are away from home, start by leaving them crated while you are home and nearby – while doing laundry or watching TV – however, don't forget that you are still training your dog - remember to reward them often if they are being calm in the crate while you move about the house. Eventually graduate to going outside for short periods of time (just half a minute or less at first). At this point in training, especially if your dog suffers from separation anxiety, it is all about trust – do not assume, because your dog is ok in the crate while you grab the mail, that they will also be ok with you going grocery shopping – work up to this by being outside of the house, but in a place where you can “spy” on your dog for gradually increasing amounts of time.
 - a. Consider providing mental enrichment - such as a stuffed frozen KONG toy. You may even consider feeding your dog their meals through a frozen KONG, which can keep them occupied for hours. Below are some tips for stuffing a KONG so that meals can last as long as possible. **If your dog is a powerful chewer, supervise your dog with any toy before ever leaving them unattended with it.**

It is NEVER recommended to leave your dog in a crate for more than 5-6 hours during the day and/or while you are not home. If your dog sleeps in his crate overnight, it is ok to reach 8-9 hours.



KONG stuffing tips

1. **Fill KONG toy 2/3 full with your dog's regular kibble.**
 2. **Add a layer of something extra yummy bits of cooked chicken, cooked lean ground beef, canned pumpkin, canned dog food or non-fat yogurt.**
 3. **"Seal" the top with peanut butter and/or a Milkbone type treat**
 4. **Freeze overnight**
- *It's a smart idea to have 2-3 prepared Kongs in the freezer ready to go.**

Helping Your Dog to Cope with Being Alone

Dogs are pack animals, so naturally, they prefer to be with their family (or pack). Some dogs need more help than others when it comes to feeling comfortable when alone. Here are some tips to help your dog be more at ease when he is home alone.

1. **OBEDIENCE:** Consider taking your dog through obedience training- though it seems unrelated, it's amazing to see the difference in confidence, when comparing a dog who has a solid obedience foundation, work ethic and sense of purpose, compared to one who doesn't. Obedience classes aren't just for "Bad dogs" – getting out and coming to classes with your dog can be a fantastic way to develop a mutual working respect for each other – dog's who have this type of relationship with their owners tend to have significantly less anxiety related problems at home.
2. **ROUTINE & EXERCISE:** Ensure your dog has a predictable routine that includes **daily physical and mental exercise and scheduled feedings**. Structured walks with obedience thrown in (such as sits, downs and stays) are always a good idea – but other "games" like hide and seek that require

your dog to think are great ideas as well. If his mind AND body have been exercised prior to your departure, he is much more likely to be ready to rest and be at ease when you inevitably leave him home alone. Please feel free to contact our behavior department for ideas about how to mentally AND physically exercise your dog.

3. **INDEPENDENCE:** Do you have what some call a “Velcro dog”? – that is, a dog that tends to follow you around everywhere. Help them learn that they can survive without being glued to your side by making a tether in the room you spend the most time in – like the kitchen or family room. Attach the tether to a sturdy piece of furniture like the Sofa leg. Attach the tether to your dog’s flat collar (DO NOT tether them to any corrective device like a Good dog Collar, gentle leader or choke chain) and give them a stuffed Kong or other highly desirable toy. Sit near them while you watch tv, read, check emails etc... periodically get up and leave the room for short periods of time – like to get a glass of water, or go to the bathroom. By tethering them, and removing their ability to follow you from room to room, they will see that when you leave, you don’t leave for long and you always come back. **Remember to be “random” in your departures from the room, so as to be careful not to cue them that you’re about to leave. Also, ignore them for just a moment when you come back – don’t make a big deal – once you settle back down to what you were doing, you may offer soft, genuine praise.

4. **PREPARING TO LEAVE:** If you have gone through the steps of crate training your dog, and are leaving them crated while you are out of the house, develop a habit of crating your dog about 5-10 minutes prior to your departure and leave them in the crate for 5-10 minutes after you get home (this will also help your dog get out of -or not develop- the habit of going totally bonkers when you get home). Avoid making a “big deal” out of your arrivals and departures. When you give your dog lots of attention just prior to leaving and right when you arrive home, it can seem like a bigger void when you are gone – essentially **YOU** are making departures and arrivals a “big deal” – when they really shouldn’t be!

** Work to minimize differences between short departures and long ones.

** Sometimes leaving a radio or TV on quietly (only if these are normally on when you are home) as well as a piece of your unwashed clothing near the crate will help your dog feel more comfortable being alone, if it sounds and/or smells like you are home.

Please feel free to call Ark-Valley Humane Society with any questions you have in regards to training your new dog. A behavior consultant would be more than happy to assist you with any questions or concerns that arise. Our main number is 719-395-2737.

