

## **Dog Crates are Great**

Our topics for this week are:

- **Dog crates for housebreaking puppies, calming adult dogs, and transportation during emergencies**
- **Selecting a dog crate**
- **Crate training**

Dog ancestors lived in dens for shelter and security. Crates are a modern day dog den and gives dogs of all ages a sense of security and safety and helps give owners greater peace of mind. Dogs instinctively seek small spaces to create protective shelters for themselves. Crates are useful training tools for puppies, safe havens for adult dogs, and lifesavers for emergencies.

Crate training is an essential part of housebreaking puppies. Dogs typically do not like to soil their sleeping quarters. With a proper sized crate, they learn to avoid soiling indoors.

Medical procedures often require restricted movement during the healing phase. Crates can assist in the recovery from surgery or illnesses.

In emergencies, you must be able to evacuate your dog efficiently. Having dogs secured during evacuations reduces the chance of them getting lost or injured. It also allows your dog to stay with you during an emergency, since dogs typically have to be crate trained to remain in shelters with their owners.

Crates help dogs learn to deal with their anxiety, during situations where they become distressed, like during firework displays, thunderstorms, house maintenance, or construction. Dogs can retreat to their crates when situations are too chaotic or scary. It also helps dogs deal with new situations successfully, like the addition of a new pet, introduction to a new baby, or having house visitors.

Crates make it easier to safely transport your dog by car or by air. It's essential for a dog to know how to be comfortable in a crate if they are to be transported by air since dogs must normally be contained in crates on airplanes.

Crate training early in a dog's life aids in housebreaking puppies. Older dogs that are dealing with illnesses like incontinence, arthritis, or canine cognitive dysfunction are more easily cared for if they are contained in crates. Crate training helps senior dogs deal with health issues by

providing a restful place to rest their joints or take frequent naps, prevents nighttime wandering, and makes transporting them to vet appointments easier.

New dogs in a household can adjust to new situations and environments more gradually if crate-trained.

Crate training is needed for hunting dogs to provide them safe transportation. Crates for hunting dogs also help hunters with vehicle cleaning after hunts.

### **Tips for Successful Crate Training**

The goal in crate training is to have the dog associate the crate with pleasant events: food, sleep, and security.

- This begins with consistently feeding them meals or treats every time they enter their crate so crate time feels like a reward.
- While crates can be used to manage a behavior, they should never be used for punishment.
- Don't leave your dog in the crate too long. A dog who's crated all day and night doesn't get enough exercise or human interaction which can cause depression or anxiety.
- Puppies under 6 months of age shouldn't stay in a crate for more than three or four hours at a time since they can't control their bladders or bowels for that long.
- The crate should always have a comfortable bed and the door left open when you're home so your dog can enter it when they need a safe space. Everyone should leave a dog alone if he or she goes into their crate.

### **Crate Selection**

Types of crates include:

- Plastic (often called "flight kennels" or clamshell crates)
- Fabric on a collapsible, rigid frame
- Collapsible, wire pens

The crate should be large enough for your dog to stand up and turn around in. Some have a divider which can be removed as the puppy grows so that the same crate can be used for a puppy and as an adult. Clamshell, plastic crates are used for air travel and other situations when outside access to a crate should be limited. Wire crates allow better visibility into the crate, facilitating keep the crate clean and better ventilation. Wire crates also allow better visibility for the dog to assess its surroundings. Collapsible, fabric crates are helpful for short periods of travel.

## **The Training Process**

Crate training can take days or weeks, depending on your dog's age, temperament and past experiences. However, because crates fulfill an instinctive desire of dogs, training is generally quick and easy, if done correctly.

### ***Step 1: Introduce your dog to the crate***

Place the crate in an area of your house where the family spends a lot of time. Put a soft blanket or bed in the crate. Tie the door open and let the dog explore the crate at their leisure. Encourage your dog to enter the crate by dropping some small food treats nearby, then just inside the door, and finally, all the way inside the crate.

### ***Step 2: Feed your dog meals in the crate***

Feed the dog their regular meals in or near the crate. At each feeding, move the food bowl a little further back into the crate. Once your dog is standing comfortably in the crate to eat their meal, you can close the door while they're eating. The first time you do this, open the door as soon as they finish their meal. With each successive feeding, leave the door closed a few minutes longer, until they're staying in the crate for 10 minutes or so after eating.

### ***Step 3: Practice with longer crating periods***

After your dog is eating their regular meals in the crate with no sign of fear or anxiety, you can confine them there for short periods of time while you're home. Repeat this process several times a day, gradually increasing the length of time you leave them in the crate and the time that you are out of their sight.

### ***Step 4, Part A: Crate the dog when you leave***

After your dog can spend about 30 minutes in the crate without becoming anxious or afraid, you can begin leaving them crated for short periods when you leave the house. Put them in the crate using your regular command and a treat. Although they shouldn't be crated for a long time before you leave, you can crate them anywhere from five to 20 minutes prior to leaving. Your departures should be matter-of-fact. After they enter the crate and you give them a treat, you should ignore them and leave. When you return home, the dog will likely be excited, but you should quietly let them out to greet you without receiving praise. Your arrival should be low-key to avoid increasing their anxiety during your absence. Once you and the dog are away from the crate more interaction is fine. You want to unlink getting out of the crate on your arrival with praise and excitement. Continue to crate your dog for short periods from time to time when you're home so they don't associate crating with being left alone.

### ***Step 4, Part B: Crate your dog at night***

Put your dog in the crate using your regular command and a treat. A puppy's crate should be within hearing distance since they often need to go outside to eliminate during the night. You will want to investigate restlessness and let puppies out to eliminate frequently. If your dog

whines or cries while in the crate at night, it may be difficult to decide whether they're whining to be let out of the crate, or whether they need to be let outside to eliminate.

If your dog is just testing you, they'll probably stop whining soon. Never punish them for whining.

If the whining continues after you've ignored them for several minutes, use the phrase they associate with going outside to eliminate. If they respond and become excited, take them outside. This should be a trip with a purpose, not play time. Stand in one spot in your yard where they normally go to eliminate and wait. If you're convinced that your dog doesn't need to eliminate, the best response is to ignore them until they stop whining.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects contact us at [CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com](mailto:CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com)

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Crate training provides dogs with a sense of security.**
- 2. Crates provide dogs with means of safer transportation and recovery from illnesses and injuries.**
- 3. Crates are highly useful in housebreaking puppies.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources. My new spiral-bound handbook, *Concise Handbook of Small Animal Handling* was recently published and can be found on Amazon as well as other major book sellers.

Additional information is provided at: [www.betteranimalhandling.com](http://www.betteranimalhandling.com) . This website has more than 100 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.