



Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA

Cratetraining & Creating Your Puppy's Schedule

Cratetraining is an excellent method for housetraining dogs and the side benefit of reducing common problem behaviors. The crate becomes the dog's "safe" place where she can't make a mistake and get into trouble. The crate is never used for punishment or isolation. If the crate is used correctly, a dog should choose to spend time in her crate because she views being in her crate as a positive experience.

Crates are made of molded plastic, metal wire, or fabric and available at most pet supply stores. The best type of crate to use will depend on your lifestyle and your dog's preference. Many metal and fabric crates can be folded up for easy storage and travel. Metal crates allow a dog to have full vision of her surroundings, while plastic and fabric crates are more confining. Some dogs prefer more enclosed spaces, while others prefer more visibility.

An adult dog should not be crated for longer than 5 hours, except at night. Puppies, however, cannot be crated nearly this long; their crate time is based on age and level of bowel/bladder control. We've provided a guide to explain this on the following page. If you work 8-10 hours a day, crating is NOT the answer since a dog should never be crated that long. Instead, consider confining the dog to a single room in the house, such as the kitchen, using a baby gate.

Desensitizing a dog to a crate

Many owners make the mistake of buying a crate and locking their dog in it as soon as they bring the crate home. This is a recipe for disaster, as the dog will likely hate being in the crate and will try to break out of it. Instead of forcing a dog to go into a crate, take the time to slowly desensitize the dog to the crate. Move the crate around the house to wherever family members might be, and leave the door to the crate open with a few tasty treats inside. Then, let the dog explore the crate on her own. After a couple days, stuff a chew toy (i.e. a Kong) with kibble and peanut butter, put the chew toy in the crate, and shut the

crate door, **without** your dog in it. Your dog will beg to be let into the crate! Let her in so she can chew away! Then start shutting the crate door for very short periods of time (i.e. 5 minutes), and opening the door again. **Gradually** increase the amount of time you leave your dog in the crate. Remember, until your dog is trained to be in the crate for an extended period of time, do not leave her in the crate when you leave home. Instead, leave her in a sectioned-off part of your home, such as the kitchen.

If your dog cries or whines when left in the crate, ignore her. Do not let her out until she has been quiet for at least 30 seconds. If you do the desensitization process correctly, however, your dog should not cry or whine when left in her crate. Remember, the goal is for your dog to see her crate as a happy place!

Using confinement for housebreaking

If a crate is being used for housebreaking, it should only be large enough for the dog to stand up, lie down and turn around. Getting the right size is essential. The area needs to be small enough so the dog will not eliminate in one end of the crate and lay down at the other end. Most dogs will avoid laying in their own feces and urine.

Knowing your dog's elimination schedule is crucial to the housetraining process. It is impossible to know this schedule if you free-feed a dog from a bowl. A dog should to be fed at specific times of the day, ideally out of hollow chew toys, inside of her crate. Once you know your dog's schedule, you can take her outside when it is time for her to eliminate. If she does not eliminate, she needs to go into her crate. Take her out every 30 minutes until she has eliminated, at which point praise and reward her. Afterwards, she may be free in the house, but it is always best to have the dog in the same room with you so you can supervise her. If you can't supervise her, she should be in her crate.



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If you have a puppy, only use a crate for short-term confinement (up to one hour), while you are home. When you leave your house, place the puppy in a penned-in area that includes her crate/bed (which should be left open), food, water, chew toys, and a “bathroom area.” For best results, make the bathroom area as much like the outdoors as possible, either by sprinkling grass and dirt on a puppy pad or purchasing a more expensive pan with AstroTurf that can be drained and cleaned.

Using a crate for behavior modification

In addition to prevent house soiling accidents, a crate can also be a useful tool for eliminating unwanted behaviors such as destructive chewing and jumping on furniture. Use the crate to confine the dog when

you are unable to supervise her in your home. That way, there will be no chewing mishaps or furniture climbing when you are absent. If you supervise the dog when you are home and praise her for staying off of the furniture and show her the appropriate items to chew, the destructive chewing and furniture jumping will eventually stop.

Cratetraining can also be very beneficial for fearful dogs because it allows them to have a place where they feel safe and secure. For example, if you have an adult dog who gets scared when people come to your house, crate train her! Then, if you have a party, you can put your mind at ease knowing your dog is resting safely in her crate in another room, rather than becoming stressed out by all of the people.

Your Puppy's Schedule & Development

Under 3 months

- Establish schedule for activities (meals, exercise, training)
- Start feeding kibble from hollow chew toys (Kongs) so puppy learns to love chew toys
- Crate for no more than 1 hour when at home
- Keep in pen with “bathroom area” when owner is away from home
- Excellent time to start Puppy Class (at 2 months of age)

3 - 4 months old

- Continue to adhere to schedule
- May be crated for up to 1 hour
- Need variety of toys for teething and chewing
- Continue with socialization and training
- Enroll in Puppy Class if have not already done so

4 - 6 months old

- Continue to adhere to schedule
- Continuing need for exercise, socialization and training
- Can be crated up to 2- 3 hours

6 months to 1 year

- Feed 2 times per day
- Important to have set routine for play, exercise, and rest
- Maximum crate time - 5 hours
- May be left alone for 6 or more hours based specific behavior and habits of animal

For more info, call our free Behavior Helpline (650/340-7022 x783 or, for Spanish, x786) or consider a low-cost consultation. To make a consultation appointment, call 650/340-7022 x667. The PHS/SPCA Behavior Department, like many shelter programs, is funded by donations.