

Behavior Solutions

Crate Training:

You wouldn't leave a toddler unsupervised in your home, so why would you leave your dog loose and unsupervised without him knowing what is and isn't expected? Crate training can be a benefit to both you and your dog. Keeping your dog in a crate while you are unable to supervise him can keep him from hurting himself, as well as prevent problems that can turn into habits later on, such as chewing on inappropriate things or eliminating in the house. Dogs are a den animal, which means they often feel more comfortable and secure in a small area. A crate provides your dog with his own private space to chew on a toy, relax, or get away from outside activity. The crate may be used to keep your dog safe while traveling in a car and is necessary should he have to fly anywhere. Crate training will also help him be comfortable in a confined area in case he must be boarded at a kennel or stay overnight at the vet.

Dogs of any breed and any age can be crate trained as long as it remains a positive experience. The size of crate you get for your dog should be big enough for him to comfortably stand, turn around, and lie down. When purchasing a crate for a puppy you have several options: buy an appropriate sized crate at each stage of his growth or buy one that will accommodate him as an adult; a wire crate, or a plastic crate. With the larger crate, simply block off the unneeded area of the crate and keep expanding this area as he grows. Dogs are often more at ease in plastic crates as this gives them more privacy and they are still able to see out. In choosing a wire crate your dog may be more relaxed with a blanket covering the top and sides, leaving the front open so he may see out. You will want to keep the crate in an area of your house that is quiet and has reasonably low traffic through it at first. Once he is used to the crate it may be moved to whatever area best suits you. Comfy bedding and special toys should be kept in the crate to keep your dog comfortable, occupied, and reduce the stress of being left alone. Toys that are small enough to swallow or choke on, or that may be torn up should not be kept in the crate. Interactive toys or chew toys work well because they keep your dog busy. These particular toys should only be given to him when he is in the crate so he will be excited about them and therefore excited about being in the crate. Meals may also be fed to your dog while he is in the crate, but make sure you are able to take him out to potty afterwards to avoid an accident. It is very important that the crate remains a good place for your dog to be in and it is not used as punishment.

Crate training can begin at any age, but it is usually easier to begin when your dog is young. To start, place the crate in the area where it will be kept with the door open. Toss a treat to the back of the crate and allow your dog to get it and come back out. Repeat this several times until your dog shows he is comfortable going in and out of the crate. Next, toss the treat into the crate and allow your dog to go in and get it, but this time close the door behind him. Leave the door closed for a few seconds, reward him through the door and then release him. Repeat this several times so he will get used to being in the crate with the door closed. It is important to not release your dog from the crate until he is calm and quiet. Releasing him when he barks or whines will show him that this is how he gets attention from you and can turn into a problem behavior later on. Gradually increase the amount of time he stays in the crate with the door closed until he

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is able to calmly stay there for an extended time. You should return to the crate every 15-30 minutes to reward your dog for remaining calm and quiet. The maximum amount of time your dog remains in the crate should be kept under four hours. Any longer and your dog should be confined to a room or area of your house where he has more room to move around and an area to eliminate. Be sure that your dog has had a chance to exercise and eliminate before he goes to his crate.

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