



**METRO NASHVILLE**  
ANIMAL CARE & CONTROL

**CRATE TRAINING GUIDELINES**

**WHY Crate Training?**

Have you ever noticed that many dogs choose to sleep under something or curl up in a ball with their shoulders in a corner? Dogs are by nature, den animals. A crate can provide your dog with a safe quiet place to find comfort and can help them feel safe and secure. Crates can be used for housetraining and can limit your dog's access to areas of the house while they learn house manners. Crates are also a safe way to transport your pet! It is important to remember that a crate is not a solution for all canine behavior, and if not used correctly can cause your dog to become distressed and frustrated.

**Crate SELECTION:** There are many different types of crates available, and it is important to pick one that is appropriate for your dog and your specific needs. Some of the most common crates include plastic crates, fabric collapsible crates, and metal collapsible crates. **Your dog's crate should be large enough for them to stand up fully and turn around in.** Crates can be purchased at most pet supply stores.

**Hard Plastic/Airline Crate** – The safest crate for most any dog to be left home alone in is a hard plastic/airline crate and is the best choice for dogs with separation anxiety or escape tendencies. Not only does this provide the most authentic den experience, it limits escape and is least likely to injure your dog if he panics and tries 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.

**Wire Crate** – NOT recommended for dogs with separation anxiety or strong escape tendencies but works well for house/potty training. A wire crate also works well for a dog who may need to be crated when visitors come over so that the visitors can toss treats easily to the dog. Wire crates are more portable and storable than hard plastic/airline crates since they typically collapse and fold flat.

**Soft Crate** – NOT recommended for use with puppies, chewers, dogs with separation anxiety, or those with a tendency to escape. Soft crates are ideal for adult dogs who are already crate trained and are great for travel in the car and camping trips because they are lightweight and portable.

**\*Children and Dog Crates**

It is natural for children to want to enter the crate – after all, it looks like a fun “fort” to play in or to snuggle up with the dog. However, it is important to teach your children that the crate is the dog's room and is off-limits to everyone else. If the dog is in the crate, whether or not the gate is closed, then the dog is asking

for private time and should be left alone. Ensuring that your dog always has his safe place in which to take refuge will benefit everyone in the household

### **HOW Do I Crate Train?**

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. The idea of crate training may seem overwhelming at first, but once broken down into steps, the process is simple and straightforward.

- *Begin by feeding your dog their meals in the crate with the door open. You can put their food bowl in the crate or sprinkle loose dry dog food into the crate.*
- *Have the crate door open and toss really good treats into the crate for your dog to get. Do this repeatedly until your dog is readily running into the crate.*
- *Once your dog is happily going in the crate, start to point to the opening of the crate without tossing in a treat. Once your dog enters the crate, give them a treat. Do this several times until your dog is readily running into the crate when you point. You can also add a cue word with the pointing, like "crate!" or "kennel up!"*
- *Start extending how long your dog waits in the crate until you give them a treat. First give them a treat after a few seconds, then after 30 seconds, a minute, two minutes, etc.*
- *Now it is time to close the crate door. Send your dog into the crate, close the door, give a treat, and immediately open the crate door. Repeat several times.*
- *Now begin keeping the door closed for longer periods of time. Send your dog into the crate, close the door, and give a treat at varying intervals, first after a short period of time and then after longer periods of time.*
- *Begin to leave your dog in the crate with the door shut and with high value, long-lasting safe chew toys. Kong toys with your dog's food, peanut butter, or cream cheese frozen in them are highly recommended for this.*
- *Slowly work up the amount of time your dog spends in the crate. Make sure to always give your dog their favorite safe chew toys or a Kong when you leave them in the crate.*
- *Keep in mind, these steps may not all happen in one day or even one weekend!*

### **What NOT To Do:**

- 1) Never use the crate as a punishment. This may cause your dog to fear the crate and will undo all your hard work making the crate a positive, comforting, safe place.
- 2) Don't leave your dog in the crate too long too fast. Remember that crate training happens at your dog's pace, and it is important for the space to remain positive.
- 3) Crate training will not cure separation anxiety, though it may prevent destructive behaviors.

Separation anxiety must be addressed with behavior modification, sometimes with the aid of behavior medication from your veterinarian.

4) Make sure your family and guests understand that when your dog is in their crate, that is their alone time and they should not be teased or harassed while they are in their crate.

### **KONG Stuffing Tips**

1. Fill KONG toy 2/3 full with your dog's regular kibble.
2. Add a layer of something extra yummy like bits of cooked chicken, cooked lean ground beef, canned pumpkin, canned dog food, or plain yogurt. You can even add dog-friendly vegetables such as cooked or canned green beans, cooked sweet potato, or carrots.
3. "Seal" the top with peanut butter and/or a Milk bone type treat.
4. Freeze overnight.

It's a good idea to have 2-3 prepared KONGS in the freezer ready to go.

### **TIPS FOR HELPING YOUR DOG 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 basic, intermediate, and/or advanced obedience training regularly – 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 to one who doesn't. Obedience classes aren't just for "bad dogs" – going to classes with your dog can be a fantastic way to develop a mutual working respect for each other – dogs 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.

**3. INDEPENDENCE:** Do you have what some call a "Velcro dog", one that tends to follow you around everywhere? Help him learn that he 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 collar (DO NOT tether him to any type of training collar) and give him a stuffed KONG or other highly desirable toy. Sit near him while you watch TV, read, check emails, etc., and 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 him and removing his ability to follow you from room to room, he will see that when you leave it's not for long and you always come back. Remember to be random in your departures from the room to be careful not to cue him that you're about to leave. Also, ignore him for just a moment when you come back and don't make a big deal out of your return; once you settle back down to what you were doing, you may offer soft praise or a pat.

**4. PREPARING TO LEAVE:** If you have gone through the steps of crate training your dog and are leaving him 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 him in the crate for 5-10 minutes after you get home – this will 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 an event when they really shouldn't be!

➤ *Work to minimize differences in your routine just before leaving for short departures and long ones.*

➤ *Sometimes leaving a radio or TV on quietly, if these are normally on when you are home, as well as a piece of your unwashed clothing in the crate (an old t-shirt that you've recently worn on top of the bedding in the crate) will help your dog feel more comfortable being alone, as it will sound and/or smell like you are home.*

#### **VIDEO Resources for Crate Training:**

[How to Crate Train an Older Dog in 7 Steps](#)

Resources: [http://humanesociety.org/animals/dogs/tips/crate\\_training.html](http://humanesociety.org/animals/dogs/tips/crate_training.html),  
<https://dogsplayingforlife.com/resources/>

If you need more help: Seek out a consultation with a professional, certified behaviorist or a certified dog trainer:

Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers: <http://www.ccpdt.org>

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists: <http://corecaab.org>

International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants: <https://m.iaabc.org/consultant/>