



Crate Training

Crate Training is Natural

One of the biggest myths is that dogs hate their crates. It is just not true! Dogs are naturally denning animals which means they naturally live in small cave-like dens, usually a hole in the ground. Dogs feel safe and secure in their dens. It is where they sleep, where they relax, it provides shelter – it is a safe place to “get away from it all.” In fact, if you do not provide your dog with a crate, he will probably search out some other den-like place such as under a table or in a closet.

There is typically a period of separation anxiety when intruding your dog to a crate for the first time. It is completely normal. What you must realize is that the dog is not crying because he “hates the crate,” but rather because he has separation anxiety. He wants to be out with you. But he will get over it – as long as you don’t let him out when he cries. Wait until he is quiet, otherwise he will learn that crying gets him out. The period of separation anxiety usually lasts from several days up to a couple of weeks.

The Benefits

Crate training offers many benefits (besides being the safe, secure home for your dog):

- It prevents your dog from being destructive during the puppyhood.
- It prevents your puppy from eliminating in the house while you are working on potty training.
- It provides the dog with its own place to sleep (rather than your bed!)
- You can use it as a timeout (see handout for class 1 for information on how to properly use timeouts).
- Crates have actually been shown to reduce anxiety in dogs while you are not home. Without a crate, many dogs tend to pace and worry about where you’ve gone, when you’ll be back, and they also feel that they have a lot of territory to guard (the whole house).

- Compare that situation to a dog that is in the crate all day – typically they just sleep! Much less stressful!

Introducing Your Dog to a Crate

You can help your puppy become acclimated to the crate. As with every new thing the puppy experiences, it is best to introduce it gradually and keep every experience as positive as possible:

- Praise the puppy and give him a treat each time he goes into the crate. This will help create a positive associate with *going in* the crate.
- Keep it low-key when the puppy *comes out* of the crate. This will lessen the feeling that it is “great to escape” from the crate!
- If you are using the metal crate (which is less den-like than the plastic ones), try covering the top and the sides with a towel or blanket to help your puppy feel safer and more secure.
- Some people find that keeping the crate near their bed lessens the crying during the crate acclimation. Others have better luck putting the crate as far away as possible so that they can get some sleep during this stage! Either way, just make sure you don’t let the puppy out when he cries – this just teaches him to keep it up!

Teach the “Crate” Command

Toss a treat in the crate as you say the word, “Crate.” Repeat this periodically throughout the day (At least 10 times a day). Do *not* lock the dog in the crate during these training sessions. After a couple of days, your dog will respond the word, “Crate!” It a simple and useful command that can be used to tell your dog to go to his “den.”

Before long, you *will see* that your dog in fact *does love* his crate because it is 100% natural for a dog to live in a crate-like home!