

Behavior Solutions: Crate Training

Most dogs are well behaved when they are supervised or in the presence of an attentive owner. But few owners are able to stay home all day or to take their pet with them, so many dogs are left alone to roam the house on their own. When a dog is alone, he finds something to do—and it isn't washing the dishes or dusting. A curious dog can create all sorts of mischief and actually do substantial damage to your home. He could even do serious harm to himself.

Reasons for Crate Training

A crate is great for making sure your dog is safe and comfortable when you're not able to be with him or when a dog-proofed room is not an available option. Suppose you have errands to run, shopping to do, and appointments to keep during the day. How do you keep your pet safe and out of trouble while you're away? Having a dog that is crate trained can remove a lot of stress and worry from your life—and your dog's life, too. Because dogs are naturally den animals, they seek a place where they can feel protected and comfortable.

Crate training allows you to keep your dog confined in a safe, secure area of your home while you're away for short periods of time. A crate provides an area of privacy and calm where a dog might bring a bone or a favorite toy, or just relax away from the hubbub of household activity. A crate can also be a helpful house-training tool. (For information about house-training with a crate, please refer to Starmark's "Behavior Solutions: House-Training".)

The Ins and Outs of Crate Training

By applying a few simple training techniques you can keep your dog *in* the crate and *out* of trouble while you're not in the house or during special occasions at home. Early training and consistent reinforcement are the keys to successful crate training. A little patience and attention now will bring years of peace of mind in the future.

It is vitally important that the crate be seen by your dog as a pleasant place to be. Never force your dog into the crate or use the crate as punishment. You can begin to crate train your dog at any age, but it's best to start as young as possible. Always make sure your dog has been given the chance to eliminate before placing him in the crate and that he will not have to stay there for longer than four hours.

Begin by putting the crate in a convenient area of your home that doesn't have a lot of traffic or activity and where it can stay permanently. Leaving the door open, place a treat in the back of the crate and allow your dog to go inside, get it, and come back out. Repeat this procedure several times so that your pet becomes comfortable entering and leaving the crate.

The Pro-Training Clicker is a training aid that can help speed the learning process. When your dog enters the crate, click and reward him with a treat. If you do this consistently, your dog will associate the click with getting into the crate and receiving a reward. Refer to the Pro-Training Clicker guide to learn how to properly condition your dog to the clicker. For free streaming video lessons on clicker training, visit www.starmarkacademy.com.

Achieving Closure

Next, place a treat in the back of the crate, but this time *close* the door behind your dog when he enters. Keep the door closed a few seconds and give him a treat through the door, then release him. Repeat this exercise several times until your dog is comfortable being in the crate with the door closed. It's important *not* to release your dog while he is barking or whining. To do so will encourage this undesirable behavior and could cause problems in the future.

Gradually increase the amount of time he stays inside with the door closed until he can stay quietly and calmly for an extended period. You can leave the area where the crate is located, but return every ten or fifteen minutes to reward your dog for his good, quiet behavior. Eventually, he should be comfortable staying inside for up to four hours. Avoid leaving him there any longer.

Make the crate comfortable for your dog by providing him with a bed or blanket to sleep on. You can add special toys that he gets only while he is in the crate. Interactive toys, like Starmark's Everlasting Treat Ball™, will help keep your dog active and stimulated while he is in the crate. You can also feed your dog his meals there to help make the crate his favorite place to be.

Selecting a Crate

There are two kinds of crates you can buy for your dog, plastic and metal. Plastic crates are fully enclosed except for a wire door and side openings for your pet to see out. Metal crates have a metal or plastic bottom and metal wire for the sides and top. Very often,

dogs prefer a plastic crate because it provides more privacy and security—it's more like a den. Whether you select plastic or metal, choose a crate with enough room to allow your dog to stand up, turn around, and lie down.

As for size, select a crate that will accommodate your dog when he is fully grown. If you have a puppy, you can block off part of the crate so that its volume will suit his size.

Then gradually enlarge the living area as your dog grows. Of course you can always buy new crates as your puppy matures.

Trainer Developed: Academy Tested

The certified training and behavior specialists at Starmark Animal Behavior Center created this behavior solutions guide with you and your dog's needs in mind. Products mentioned in this guide are available at pet supply retailers, as well as online at our web site: www.dogtrainingandboardingaustin.com. All products, guides, and videos are tested and approved by the training directors of Starmark Academy, our accredited school for professional dog trainers. It is the hands-on experience of our training division, combined with the vast technical knowledge and experience of the Starmark Academy staff that allows us to bring you useful and unique dog training and behavior solutions. We train dogs just like yours every day; we work with owners just like you every day. Thank you for choosing Starmark, the world leader in pet education.

For additional pet solutions and information about our products, please visit Starmark online at our web sites: www.dogtrainingandboardingaustin.com; www.schoolfordogtrainers.com; and www.starmarkacademy.com.

Starmark Trainer Recommended Equipment

Pro-Training Clicker— A fast and easy way to teach your dog obedience commands.

It's like saying "Well done," on time, every time your dog does something you like.

Everlasting Treat Ball— A great way to keep your dog happily occupied while in the crate. The unique shape of the ball allows it to wobble and roll on its own. It is hollow, so you can also hide treats or a meal in it.

Everlasting Treats— Chew treats designed to fit on the ends of the Everlasting Treat Ball. Also great by themselves as tasty snacks.

Pro-Training Treats— Bite-size treats to fit inside the Everlasting Treat Ball. Used alone, these treats are perfect as tasty food rewards during training.

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