



The Complete Guide to Housetraining Your New Puppy or Adult Dog

The Secrets of Successful Housetraining

Understanding that dogs have no moral or physical attachments to your new carpet or freshly waxed hardwood floors is the first step to helping your canine companion learn the ins and outs of housetraining- literally and figuratively! Housetraining is easy if you can simply relax and understand that dogs are just dogs, and they really don't care where they eliminate until you teach them differently. The challenge you face is that you will need to communicate to your dog or puppy that "going" where you prefer will be worth his time and effort.

In other words, in your dog's mind, the carpet is just as good as the grass, the tile floor is more convenient than the cold patio, or the rug by the doggie door is faster than going outside through that flapping thing that touches him on the butt as he exits.

Good housetraining behaviors not only include the physical mechanics of training, (coupled with a good reinforcement history), it also requires a realistic view of dogs so that your focus is not on accidents, but on successes.

Note: This guide will address normal housetraining and associated problems. It will not address urine-marking or submission urination problems, but using much of this information will also have a positive effect on those issues as well.

What can you *really* expect at different life stages?

Puppies under 24 weeks old: Puppies naturally do not want to soil their own space and will readily leave their sleeping area to eliminate if provided with a convenient place to go when they "feel the

need." This is a natural behavior for puppies that is learned early on from their mothers.

At around 3-4-weeks-old, the mother dog stops cleaning up after the puppies. This is also the age when they are becoming mobile and begin to follow their mother out of the whelping area when she leaves. All that movement produces "movement" and the puppies are able to successfully use areas away from their sleeping quarters. It only takes a few good repetitions of this and the puppies naturally start to build bladder and bowel muscles along with a preference of eliminating away from where they sleep. It doesn't take long before the puppies are able to "hold it" for longer and longer periods of time. This is why puppies easily accept crate training when it is introduced properly.

The beauty of using a crate or managed confinement is that housetraining comes together in just a matter of weeks when the confinement is used correctly.

Unfortunately, this natural process is often interrupted when a puppy is not provided access to areas away from his sleeping quarters. Puppies that have been kept in confined areas, such as in some pet shops, are often more difficult to housetrain than puppies that are given the opportunity to leave, or be removed regularly to relieve themselves in the early stages of their lives.

While every puppy is different, with a strong positive reinforcement history it can be expected that most puppies should be sleeping through the night by 10-14 weeks and be pretty reliable in the house by 14-18 weeks.

The real trick to success at these early ages is the combination of a positive reinforcement history, and prevention of as many accidents as possible. The recommendation is to set up a schedule and really stick with it until you are sure your puppy is able to "tell" you when he has to go to the potty area.

This may require that you take your puppy out as often as every 1-2 hours in the early stages and *always* after the puppy has eaten, waken up from a nap or just had a play session. Those situations require taking the puppy out then, in addition to the 1-2 hour schedule in the beginning.

The good news is that you should be able to space the timing out a little more every day, as puppies mature that quickly. Still, you will need to keep an eye on your puppy to avoid “mistakes,” until you have constant successes.

Adolescent dogs: This category would include most dogs from 6 months to somewhere close to two-years of age. Again, every dog is different and some may mature faster than others, but it is generally thought that most dogs reach full maturity by the age of two.

Crate or confinement training is always the fastest and most effective route to successful houstraining, but at this age it is even more important that if you do choose this method, that you introduce confinement or crates as a positive and comfortable place for your dog to hang out between the times spent with you or the family.

The best part of working with an adolescent dog is that they are readily houstrained with less effort than most puppies. It only requires consistency in giving them the “correct” answers about where you would like them to go.

Training the adolescent dog is easier since they are not only more mature in age, but also in body. Their bladders and bowels are stronger, generally enabling them to hold on longer between visits to the relief area. They are also more mature emotionally and it is this combination that facilitates faster houstraining than with most young puppies.

Adult dogs: Adult dogs, those dogs over two years, (give or take a few months), can be separated into two different categories when considering houstraining. The first category is the adult dog that needs remedial houstraining; those that have had some houstraining experience, but are

having accidents not associated with medical problems or age.

The other category is the adult dog that has never been houstrained with the goal to have them successfully living in the home.

In many ways, the adult dog is just as easy to houstrain as younger dogs, but more difficult in others if they have been allowed to “practice” the unwanted behavior over long periods of time.

However, with consistent training and positive reinforcement most adult dogs can be effectively houstrained in just a matter of weeks. Nevertheless, it requires being proactive and using good management to prevent accidents during the training period.

Understanding and using managed confinement and/or crate training is always a good choice in both of the adult dog types.

Expectations- the Reality Check

Whether your pooch is an 8-week-old puppy or a 10-year-old adult dog, you can, and should expect the “3 P’s”- Poop, Pee and Puke at some point in their lives! Even the most houstrained pups or fastidious dogs can, and do have accidents, get tummy aches, or are left indoors a little too long when traffic jams and overtime at work delay their humans from getting home at a reasonable hour to let them out. All of the above mentioned reasons, (as well as many more), might cause your dog to have an accident or two during their lifetime; (and don’t be surprised if you happen upon it in the middle of the night with both feet at least once!).

The main consideration is to realize that dogs don’t do these things to upset you; these occasions are nothing more than accidents and should be given little, if any attention if you don’t want your dog to become anxious about this kind of mishap in the future.

Realistic expectations are very important to successful houstraining. It’s essential to realize that dogs don’t adhere to human principles; they don’t feel remorse about relieving their bladder on

the carpet- it's just as good a place to go as the grass, at least until you teach them differently. The reality of having a dog that has not been taught where to go is much like having a precocious, 1-year-old child in the house, unsupervised and not wearing a diaper! That is the level of supervision and management commitment you will need to houstrain your puppy or dog.

The best advice for anyone with a dog- houstrained or not- is to have a good carpet steam cleaner along with a gallon of a good enzymatic cleaning product to make sure you get all of the mess cleaned up when those accidents do happen.

The Power of Positive Reinforcement

If ever there were a running thread of advice for successful houstraining, it is prevention and positive reinforcement training. Each time your dog has an "accident" in an inappropriate area, he is actually being reinforced for going there since the relief of emptying the bladder or bowels is a rewarding feeling in itself. Add to that the convenience of not going outside if it's raining or hot, or the soft feel of your new area rug under your dog's feet, and your dog might just be convinced to continue to eliminate where it is most comfortable or convenient.

The Importance of your Dog's Reinforcement History

Reinforcement history is the number of times a behavior has been reinforced verses the number of times it has not. This sounds pretty simple, however, it can work both ways. For instance, if your dog or puppy has been having lots of accidents in the house and few successes in the area where you would like to have him eliminate, your dog's reinforcement history is weighted toward the side of going in the house. Dogs repeat behaviors that result in reward and relieving the bladder or bowels is a big reward, which means that they are more likely to go in the house over and over again if that has been "working," in his effort to relieve himself. It's also easy to see it go the other direction as well. In other words, if your dog has had only a few accidents and lots of successes in the potty area

(coupled with praise and/or a treat) you are weighting the scale on the side of successful houstraining.

By now, you should understand that your dog or puppy has no particular investment in your home or flooring, and that means it is your responsibility to prevent accidents and reinforce the successes. This is how you establish a positive reinforcement history for you and your dog!

The Ins and Outs of Successful Houstraining

Where to start? Houstraining should start with a plan and the best way to visualize a plan is to keep a log. There is a sample log at the end of this guide for you to copy or to give you some ideas on how to create your own version.

Typically, plan to take your dog or puppy outside to the potty area at least every 1-2 hours in the beginning stages of houstraining, and always be willing to adjust this if your dog is having accidents within this time schedule.

Setting an alarm is a good reminder if you think you will have trouble remembering.

Young puppies should always be monitored either in a crate or in the visual range of the pet parent at all times to make sure that they don't have accidents.

Size and age considerations: The younger the puppy and/or the smaller the dog or puppy adds some variables to houstraining. Puppies under 10 weeks will need to be taken out more frequently because of the immaturity of their brains, their bladders and their bowels. Toy or tiny breed dogs often need more opportunities to go out in the beginning since they have tiny bladders that can only expand so far. This should be considered, not only during houstraining, but for long-term confinement as well.

The good news is that a week of practice can make a world of difference when houstraining a young puppy or a tiny dog, so don't fret, it will get better if you stick with your training.

How do you know when to take them out: In the beginning, young puppies as well as adult dogs won't know how to tell you that they need to go out so you will have to watch them for the tell-tale signs.

Here are some of the signs that your dog or puppy needs to go out:

- Sniffing the ground
- Abruptly stop playing or chewing
- Sniffing in circles
- Whining or barking
- Play biting more
- Going to or toward the door
- Starting to squat
- Scratching at crate door
- Barking at door
- "Zooming" around the house at breakneck speed

Paper Training: When training young puppies, the question of pee pads or paper training often comes up. If you intend for your dog to use pee pads or paper for the rest of their lives due to lack of yard, or the size of the dog, then using pads or papers are fine and you would train the same way as for going outside, just take them to the pad or paper as part of the plan. However, if you eventually intend to have your dog go outside, it's always best to teach your dog to go there to begin with and save yourself the time of training a 2nd time when you are ready for them to use the great outdoors. Some exceptions might be the weather, or if you have to take your puppy to potty in an area where there have been lots of adult dogs and your puppy is not fully vaccinated.

Food and its effects on houstraining: One factor that can help with houstraining, as well as with other impulse control issues, is the quality of the food you feed your dog. Many brands of dog food contain a high percentage of corn, (which is used as a source of protein). Many other dog foods contain high amounts of carbohydrates such as rice, soy and wheat that are used mostly as filler. Dogs don't need carbohydrates, (as do we), but if your food contains them, they should be complex carbohydrates that are from human-quality grain sources, and that is where some of the dog foods miss the mark. Often, the grains in dog foods are

sub-human quality products that often include only the broken portions of the grain. Adding fillers, such as these, only serve to add empty carbohydrates and calories, and not necessarily nutritional content.

Much like when athletics "carb up," it is not hard to imagine your dog or puppy getting ready to run a marathon after eating the vast amounts of carbohydrates found in a number of common dog foods.

Then, when you are trying to train your dog, he will have a hard time staying focused and learning- after all, thinking clearly is hard to do on a sugar high, which is what happens when the body converts carbs to glucose!

The other problem with ingredients such as wheat and soy is they can also contain mold spores that are known for causing allergic reactions. Even mild allergies can affect the success of houstraining since internal irritations lead to distractions and stress on the body in general. Physical stress, such as allergy reactions (some may not even manifest into visible symptoms, but may exist nevertheless) requires more fluids to produce chemicals to try and counter the reactions, and in turn more urination, making houstraining more difficult. Excess water drinking can and often is a sign of physical or mental stress, and if medical problems such as a bladder infection have been ruled out, this is most often a sign of a stressor. With that in mind, it is best to eliminate the two most allergy associated grains from your dog's food- wheat and soy- so you are playing on an even field when trying to houstrain.

"The "whole grains" used in many dog foods have had the starch removed and the oil extracted (usually by chemical processing) for vegetable oil; or they are the hulls and other remnants from the milling process. If whole grains are used, they may have been deemed unfit for human consumption because of mold, contaminants, or poor storage practices" (The Allergy Solution for Dogs, Messonnier, D.V.M., p156)

Corn, on the other hand presents a different problem that also makes housetraining more difficult:

“A common protein source in dog food is corn. Corn, however, is unusually low in tryptophan and represents some risk to animals sensitive to serotonergic under activity.” (O’Heare 2000, p215)

Serotonin is what keeps dogs well balanced and is responsible for the control of mood, arousal and sensitivities to pain, sounds and touch. An imbalance of serotonin can cause sleep problems and mood shifts during times when your dog is awake; thus making housetraining that much more difficult. Many behaviorists when dealing with behavior problems recommend the elimination of corn in the diet.

The other reason to switch to one of the Super-premium foods is the amount of protein density. If you feed one of the high-end foods, you will get more calories per cup than in the lesser foods. Those lesser foods require feeding 1-3 times more food to get the same calorie and nutritional content. In turn, that equates to more waste for you to pick up, as well as more bowel movements to try and manage.

The Whole Dog Journal does a yearly Top Ten Dry dog food list of the best foods on the market that meet the above standards. This newsletter receives no advertising and is not biased toward any particular food, making them a great reference for some of the high-end dog foods.

Snacks and treats should also be of the same high quality ingredients as the dog food, so be sure to read the labels and avoid corn, wheat and soy products.

One more component to successful housetraining is when to feed your dog. Puppies under 6 months are typically fed 3-4 times a day, which means that you will need to take that puppy out within 15-30 minutes after they eat. It’s important to have your puppy on a schedule that can predict when your puppy will have to go potty so free feeding is not an option.

Adolescent and adult dogs should eat at least twice a day, and, again, it is important that you do not “free feed” your adult dog since that nibbling all day can result in unpredictable bowel habits.

The House Training Plan

Again, stressing that prevention and a strong positive reinforcement history are the keys to successful housetraining; the actual process is relatively simple.

The following are some of the preparation ideas and things to consider before putting your housetraining plan into place.

Where do you want the dog to go? Making a decision about where you would like your puppy or dog to go is the first step to successful housetraining. Many people have limited areas to relieve their dogs and must take them on leash to that area. Some have small dogs that they would prefer to train to use a littler box, paper or a pad. Still others would prefer their dogs use the back yard, but only in one area, or maybe on a concrete patio. And, finally, there are others that allow free access to the whole yard and really don’t care where they eliminate, just so long as it’s not in the house.

Some of this decision will also need a look at the person’s lifestyle: Will the dog need to be able to go on different surfaces because the pet parent travels to many different areas? Will the dog need to be able to eliminate on a leash, or off a leash? In this case, both on and off leash will need to be practiced. Will the dog or puppy need to use a little box sometimes, but at other times use the grass during an outing? Again, this will take some practice with both areas.

If you are working with an adult dog, you may have to test where your dog might naturally go and whether he will be able to go on or off leash and then re-train or accept your dog’s limits.

Timing is everything to successful housetraining. Be sure to give you dog or puppy lots of opportunities to go out in the beginning. When they are successful, you will need to communicate

that they did the correct behavior, but only *after* they are completely finished.

One of the most essential components of successful housetraining is to go with your puppy or dog to the potty area during this initial training. Equally as important is to have them on a leash right from the beginning so they are not able to wander off and “forget” what they are doing. Once you see that your pooch really has the idea of what he is supposed to be doing, you no longer have to use the leash, but you will still want to go with them in the early stages of housetraining.

The most successful housetraining routines are ones that limit the amount of time you have your dog or puppy in the potty area, and the use of managed confinement or a watchful eye until success is achieved.

When dogs or puppies are allowed to sniff around or wander through the yard without going potty and then are given free rein once back in the house, (despite not having gone while outside), accidents are in the making. Many dogs put two and two together and get in lots of sniffing and playing around because eliminating often means they have to go back in the house and it's way more fun outside. They then learn to not go potty outside because it will end the fun; of course, shortly after they go back in, they can't hold it anymore.

To insure that this doesn't happen, a leash and a watch are your best tools.

Take your puppy or dog to the potty area, on a leash and start timing the session as soon as you get there. Plan on 3-4 minutes, but no more. This will teach your pooch to hurry up and finish so they can get the reward and a chance to play. You can walk around that area if want to, but stay relatively close to where you want your dog or puppy to go. Moving around can, and often does, make things happen quicker.

During this time you can also put the action of going in one place on a verbal cue, by saying something like, “Go potty, or hurry up,” so your pooch eventually learns to go when you say those

words. Service dogs do this all the time, and it's very easy to teach your dog to go when you would like by associating the words and the actions during the early learning stages.

If your puppy or dog is successful during the 3-4 minutes, tell them, “Good dog,” in a happy voice, and give them a couple of really wonderful food treats such as a small pieces of chicken or cheese to make the process of learning that much faster.

Giving your dog a high-value food treat after your pooch has finished eliminating starts the process of building bladder and bowel muscles by teaching your dog that waiting to go in the designated potty area will result in a high value food reward. If he goes somewhere else, the result should be pretty neutral, so it's much better to “hold it,” (building muscle) and go to that place that results in the food!

You can also “buy” some extra insurance that your dog will love to go to the potty area by taking them off the leash and playing with them after they have gone potty and received their food treat. This will teach them to hurry up and go because they not only get that great food, and your praise, but a play session as well!

What to do if your pooch doesn't go: If your puppy or dog doesn't go in that 3-4 minute time period, take them away from the area and place them back into the crate or confinement area, or be prepared to keep your eye on them at all times so they don't wander away and eliminate when you aren't looking. You want this time between sessions to be as non-eventful as possible, and that is why a crate or confinement is best. Once your dog or puppy is back inside, you will wait for 10-15 minutes and then take them back to the potty area again and start the timing process all over. Usually, it only takes a couple of these sessions to get success, and if you are diligent about using this plan first thing in the morning, when you know the dog or puppy will need to go potty, your will obtain your dog's housetraining skills very quickly.

Using a clicker: This plan can also be done with a clicker to mark the correct behavior. It's important to click as soon as the dog or puppy

has finished, and then follow with the food treat, praise and the play. If you intend to use a clicker, be sure to get clear instructions about how to use it before trying it with housetraining. Your dog or puppy should already know that the clicker marks the correct behavior and that food will follow after hearing the clicker sound. The clicker frightens some dogs and housetraining could be set back if you tried to introduce it and your dog were frightened by the sound. It's important that you have already associated the clicker with food before using it during housetraining.

What to do if you "catch" them in the act of going in the house: Catching your dog or puppy going potty in the house should always be a non-event, (as hard as it might be to see your pooch squatting on the carpet or new hardwood floor!).

Dogs and puppies that receive too much negative attention for this may become frightened and learn to hide when they need to go. In contrast, they might come to believe it is a good way to get human attention even if your tone of voice was harsh- many dogs, and especially puppies love to hear our voices and it might actually become a reward in the dog's mind.

Calmness, on your part, will keep the stress levels down for you and your dog as well and not give attention to the mistake. What you should do is quietly pick up a puppy or small dog, and gently guide a bigger dog toward the area where you would like them to go. The key is to act as if it is no big deal.

If they didn't finish going potty in the house, stay with them until they do then let them know that is the correct answer by telling them, "Good dog," and giving them a high value food treat. If they did finish going in the house, you will still go through the motion and use the timed plan of 3-4 minutes while saying your cue word. When the time is up, take the puppy or dog back into the confinement area or crate until the next scheduled session to go out.

Most importantly, promise yourself to keep a better eye on him until the subsequent time you will be taking your dog to the potty area.

Using a doggie door: Doggie doors are wonderful tools. They can help facilitate your housetraining by giving your dog access to the great outdoors whenever he needs to relieve himself. The initial training is the same; you will just be encouraging your dog to go in and out of the doggie door as part of the process. It sometimes helps to tape the flap up when you first begin so the flap touching their bodies as they go through does not frighten your dog or puppy. Be sure to be waiting on the other side of the doggie door with a small treat as a reward for going through in the first place. This will make it much easier when you do put the flap down and your dog has to push his way through.

After you are convinced that your dog or puppy can manage to get through the doggie door without a problem, you can then advance to the housetraining part. Make sure you are waiting on the other side of the door with your leash and food treats and praise your dog for coming out the doggie door, then attach the leash and happily go to the potty area. Follow the training plan as laid out, but if your dog or puppy doesn't go, just go back into the house after the allotted time through the regular door, and not the doggie door at this point. You will want to be able to get your dog into the confinement area as quickly as possible when he hasn't gone potty.

How long between? Now that you have had a successful round of the timed plan, the next question would be when to take them out again. If you spent some time playing afterwards, you can then give your puppy or dog a little more time to explore in the house with you, chew on a bone, or take a nap depending on the age of the puppy or dog.

Puppies under 4 months can be on a 45-minute to one-hour interaction time schedule, and then they can spend about 2 hours in the crate or confinement area to make sure they get enough sleep. At the end of the interaction hour, take

them to the potty area and put it on the clock for those 3-4 minutes. If your pooch is successful, have a short exploration of the environment, (this can be a quiet walk around the yard, or allowing them to sniff the grass) then it's naptime for the puppy. The important component here is to allow the puppy to spend a little bit of time doing something rather than going back into the house or his confinement area.

Older puppies and young dogs can spend up to two hours of interaction time, and this makes a great time for a daily walk or play session as long as the play is not too over-stimulating since you want your dog to rest, or be left in the crate. You would use the same process with is age group after the interaction time, so they also get to take a nap after the two hours of time awake. *This interaction time could be used as the transition for when they are left in their crates or confinement areas while humans go off to work or to do other activities.

Adult dogs, of course, can go longer between the need to go to the potty area, but if this is a dog that is new to your home, it's best to start with the same time frames as the older puppy or adolescent dog. Most adult dogs are happy to take naps during the day if provided with quiet areas such as a crate that has been properly introduced.

**Please be sure that you have introduced the crate as suggested in the crate and confinement section of this guide and that you adhere to the time limits of using crates to those recommended for each age group.*

Other considerations to insure housetraining success: There are several other ways to insure your dog or puppy is successfully housetrained in a short amount of time. Here are some things to consider:

- Limit water after a certain time at night for young puppies. Pick up the water dish about two hours before they are going to go to bed at night. (Please don't limit water if your house is hot in the summertime). This will make sure that the bladder is empty and doesn't fill up as fast

after you take them out for the last time at night.

- Be sure your dog or puppy is getting plenty of rest and sleep so his body can recoup after exercise, training or play; all of which require mental and physical energy. Many dogs and puppies don't get enough rest and this makes for a cranky pooch that may not want to put in as much effort into finding his potty area when he needs to go.
- It can't be said enough that you are responsible for teaching your puppy or dog the rules for living with humans since no one gave them the "owner's manual" on how to live with us. If your puppy or dog is having accidents, you need to limit your dog's freedom and keep a better eye on him between training sessions.
- Be sure that you have regular medical checkups for your dog so he is always in optimum health. This will eliminate housetraining accidents from health problems that can turn into real issues even after your dog's health is better.

When are they reliable? Generalization needs to take place before your dog or puppy can be considered fully housetrained. That means that just because your dog or puppy now understands that going in the kitchen is not the correct answer, doesn't mean that he will know that going in the bedroom is also not correct. Your pooch should learn how let you know they need to go to the potty area from many locations in the home if you eventually want to allow them access to the entire house.

- Most puppies are considered completely reliable at around 4-6 months, but this doesn't mean that they would understand the same rules apply even when visiting someone else's home. You would need to go back to your timing and reward routine anytime you take your dog into a new place. The nice thing about having practiced at your home is that it should only take a few times of practice in the new location for your dog to understand

that it is the same rules, just a different location.

- You will also need to practice both on and off leash and in different areas away from the designated potty area if you would like your pooch to go potty in different settings that might include being on or off leash. Some people get stuck with only having their dogs go in the back yard and then when they take a trip the dog nearly busts a gut when they hold it hours and hours because they have never been taught to go in other places. Set up for success and use those morning times when your dog is pretty much guaranteed to go, to take them to other areas; such as the front yard, a different area in the back yard, on dirt if they usually go on grass and visa versa.
- Housetraining sometimes goes awry when it rains or snows, and a dog or puppy that was 100% reliable for a couple of weeks is now having accidents in the house again. This just means that you have to generalize your training to inclement weather!
- Go back to the beginning. Yes, you will have to go with them, even if it's raining or snowing so they learn that the rules are still the same, even when their feet get wet or cold.
- As a side note, be sure to get your dog or puppy used to an umbrella if you are going to use one, since they can be pretty scary to dogs that have never seen one before. Open it very slowly and low to the ground so your pooch can explore. Be sure to tell your dog how brave he is by saying, "Good dog," and giving a treat for any interaction with the umbrella. You might even go so far as to spread treats all around the umbrella so your dog or puppy can approach and "find" that the umbrella is really just a big treat dispenser.
- Many people make the mistake of believing that if their dog or puppy can hold it all through the night that they should be able to do the same during the day. However, just like humans that are able to hold it all night, there are a number of chemicals that

kick in during sleep that slow down the production of urine. That system goes right back to work with the chemicals that are available when we are awake and humans and dogs alike need to "empty" much more during hours that they are awake. So, sleeping through the night is not a good example of how long a dog or puppy is able to hold it.

- Bringing the "Outside" dog in- Lucky dog, and lucky you- this dog has had a very strong reinforcement history of going outside! The only things you will need to work on are building bladder and bowel muscles and teaching your dog how to get to that place of preference. This usually takes a little longer for dogs that have lived outdoors for a long time as they have not had to build bladder and bowel muscles since they could pretty much go potty when they felt like it. You will follow the same plan, but on the level of an older puppy or adolescent dog for a couple of weeks, since you will want to make sure they have the time needed to hold it for longer periods, then you can gradually increase the time between potty breaks.

Crate Training

Whether you are working on housetraining, or preventing your couch from being eaten in your absence, crate training is a wonderful management tool if introduced and used correctly. Making the crate a comfortable and non-stressful place for your dog should be your goal when introducing the crate; using this guide will help you achieve that goal with minimal effort.

Choosing the Right Kennel or Crate for your Dog

The type of crate you choose for your dog is important for your dog's safety and acceptance of being crated. The two most common styles are wire and airline-type, which are the hard plastic crates. There are many others on the market; some which come in "designer" styles to match many decors. However, most crates are "knockoffs" or clones of others, and the two most

common ones, the wire and airline-type will be addressed in this article.

Both types of crates have advantages and disadvantages and you will need to determine which best suits your dog by looking at the following pros and cons of each type.

Wire Crates:

Pros:

- Can be folded down for easy storage and placed under a bed or in the trunk of a car when traveling.
- For dogs that worry about you or the environment, these crate allow the dog full view of the room so they can keep an eye on things.
- Many come with a pull-out bottom tray for easy cleaning and some are adjustable for the size of the dog. These are great for growing puppies since they allow you to buy only one crate that will “grow” with the puppy.
- Allows good air circulation.
- Can be covered if needed.
- Many have one-handed lock systems for easy in and out.

Cons:

- For dogs that are overly stimulated by the environment, this type of kennel may allow too much visual stimulus. These crates can be covered, but some dogs will pull the cover inside and shred it. Fortunately, there are commercial crate covers that are more difficult for dogs to pull through because they are form-fitted to the crate.
- Dogs that become panicked, might dig or bite on the wires and bottom tray which can cause damage to paws or may break teeth.
- Airlines do not accept this type of crate if you needed to fly your dog somewhere.
- Since the wires can bend with excess pressure, dogs may escape easier from this style.

Airline-Type Crates:

Pros:

This type of crate provides more of a visual obstruction of the environment and is useful for dogs that need less stimulation in their day.

These crates also provide some noise dampening for dogs that are sensitive to sounds.

Major airlines have approved this type of kennel for flying dogs in the cargo area of planes, but check on each company’s guidelines for flying animals.

Cons:

- These crates do not fold down and are more bulky to move, and the bigger ones do not fit well in smaller vehicles. They do, however, do well in the back of trucks if secured properly.
- Some dogs find this type of crate claustrophobic.
- If your house is not climate-controlled, these do not allow good air circulation during hot weather.

Other Considerations:

Once you have decided which crate or kennel best suits your dog, you will then want to consider a couple of other things before you start training:

- Where to place the crate. Helping your dog become comfortable in several locations will optimize his comfort and make it easier if you travel with your dog since he will be familiar with his crate in lots of different places. When training your dog to the crate, move the crate to different rooms so your dog is comfortable in lots of settings.
- What will you place on the bottom of the crate floor? Does your dog love to shred lots of things? Then purchasing an expensive crate pad might not be the best option, but a couple of folded towels might do just fine.

- Plan to leave some distractions such as stuffed *Kongs or rawhides in your dog's crate, but be sure you know your dog's chewing style before you leave any of these items in there. If your dog is a slow and steady chewer, then rawhides are a good choice, as are red-colored *Kongs. On the other hand, if your dog is a voracious chewer that might ingest a whole rawhide in one sitting, this would not be a good choice as large pieces of rawhide can get trapped in a dog's stomach or intestines. This type of dog would do better with one of the black Kongs that were designed for strong jaws, or the extra hard nylon-type bones. *To learn how to make Kongs more challenging and fun for your dog, visit the Kong website: www.kongcompany.com
- Finally, your dog's crate should always be a safe place for your dog. Try to think of the crate your dog's "space," which means keeping other dogs, kids and random animals or people away from the crate when your dog is resting. After all, it wouldn't be much fun to have someone disturbing you when you are in your bed!

Teaching your Dog or Puppy to Love the Crate

Even if your dog is already using a crate, this fun, interactive version of getting your dog in the crate should encourage you to teach him this useful skill. If you have every struggled with your dog to get him in the crate, you will appreciate this easy training exercise, and the beauty of this is that it will have your dog really enjoy going in on his own, rather than the daily bribing, or cajoling that makes crate training such a hassle. The best part is he will think that it is all his idea!

To ensure success, keep in mind that crate training should always be relaxing, rewarding and safe for your dog, so if you are not in the training mood, save this exercise for a time when you can focus all your energy toward making this a fun game.

How long to crate?

The "rule of thumb" is that puppies under 6 months can be left in the crate for one hour for each month of age. For instance; a four-month-old puppy can be left for 4 hours during the day, but you will want to make sure to work up to this to ensure that your pooch is not going to have an accident. You do this by progressively adding more time as you introduce the crate.

Slowly extending the time in the crate would also be true of adult dogs that have never been crated, or have lived outside all of their lives since they will need to build bowel and bladder muscles before being left for extended times.

Many people make the mistake of believing that if their dog or puppy can "hold it" all through the night that they should be able to do the same during the day. However, just like humans who are able to hold it all night, there are a number of chemicals that kick in during sleep that slow down the production of urine for your dog as well.

That production system goes right back to work when we are awake; meaning that humans and dogs alike need to "empty" much more during hours that they are awake. In other words, sleeping through the night is not a good indicator of how long a dog or puppy is able to hold it.

Making the Crate Great:

Note: If your dog seems uncomfortable or worried about going in the crate, has had a bad experience with crating in the past, or suffers from separation anxiety, it is important to not actually put the dog in the crate in the beginning. See the subsequent section on how to desensitize a negative crate experience after this segment.

Getting started:

Have 10-15 high-value treats counted out before you start. These could include very tiny pieces of hot dogs, cheese, cooked chicken, hamburger, etc. It's important that your dog has a significant emotional event in connection to the crate, and super good treats will make sure this happens.

Begin with your dog on leash, and place or lure him into the crate. *Again, if you think your dog is*

worried or uncomfortable at this, or any other point along the way, skip to the desensitization training section of this handout and work through that program before you continue with this part.

Leave the leash on your dog and gently close the crate door, but there is no need to lock it. You want to be able to open and close the door quickly.

Slowly open the crate door, all the while using your body or leg to block the exit, to ensure your dog cannot escape.

Toss a treat to the back of the crate, and then close the door again. Be sure your dog sees the treat in your hand as you toss it behind him. You are doing this to help move your dog further away from the door so he learns that the good stuff happens toward the back of the crate.

Repeat this until all the treats are gone. The important part of tossing the treats in when the door opens is to reward your dog for not coming out when the door opens each time, and also to send a message that the really good stuff happens in the crate.

Making sure your dog does not escape; open the door as far as you can without your dog charging out. If your dog starts to move forward, gently close the door - do not slam it - to prevent your dog from coming out. After a couple of trials, your dog will get the idea that staying back from the door will make it open.

Once you are able to open the door completely without your dog rushing out, say a release word, such as "Okay, or Exit" and motion with an arm sweep for your dog to exit the crate.

If your dog comes right out, pick up his leash. Now, standing off to the side a bit so your dog is able to go back in the crate, face the front of the crate with your body turned so your shoulders face toward the entrance of the crate. Dogs understand body language so well that by facing toward the crate it will tell him that he should move in that direction. (Kind of like a laser pointer that shows him where you want him to go) Be sure the leash is loose, but short enough that your dog doesn't wander 6 feet away and get

busy doing other things. (Hint: try switching to the other side of the door on the crate if your dog does not seem to catch on right away.)

It is also important to remain quiet, without making eye contact with your dog, thus allowing him to figure out what you want him to do by means of watching your body. After your dog comes out any interaction should be very neutral and without any verbal or treat rewards. You will want your dog to understand that the only reward he will receive is when he goes back in the crate where he will be rewarded with a jackpot of treats and verbal praise.

If, for some reason, your dog does not exit the kennel when you say your release word, you will need to turn away (they will go the way your shoulders are pointing) and encourage him to come out by patting your hand on the side of your leg, making kissing noises, squatting down, etc. It is essential that your dog understands that your release word means to leave the crate. You might actually have to take a couple of steps away to encourage him to come out. Be sure to pick up the leash or take hold of it to prevent your dog from wandering off once he does come out.

Again, it is imperative that you do not reward the exit, make eye contact or talk to your dog! You want your dog to make the connection that he can come out, but treats and praise only happen in the crate.

Once your dog has exited the crate, wait for up to two minutes, *but no longer*. Be sure to time this and stay silent so your dog can really put all of his concentration into this. The time limit is so your dog doesn't get frustrated by a lack of foundation with this exercise. Don't worry if he doesn't get it the first time or so. Some dogs get it the first time, and some take a couple of sessions.

If your dog goes back into the crate on his own during the two minutes, move ahead with the next part. If your dog does not go back in during that time, go on to the Helping your dog section.

Trainer's Tip: Don't burn your dog out on training! Count out 30 treats and go as far as that will take you in a session. It's important to stop

training when you have had a good success. If you count your treats, you will know it is time to stop when your dog is doing well. It will also disappoint your dog a little that you said, “All done,” since he should be having a good time at this stage of the training. As they say in showbiz, “Always leave ‘em wanting more.”

Going forward

When your dog goes back in the crate, say “Yep” or click and toss a treat to the back of the crate and close the door again. You can also add, “Good dog.” If you want to add a couple more reinforcement treats while he is still in there, then do it just like you did as you started with the 10 treats, but this time only do a few.

Repeat the entry and exit parts until you can start moving away a few steps from the kennel when the door is opened and without your dog trying to exit the crate.

After your dog readily goes in and out of the crate using “Okay, or exit” as his release, and your body posture as his cue to enter, it is time to add a “Get in your kennel” cue just before your dog starts to enter the crate.

Once you have established the verbal cue, you can start adding some direction and distance changes to the exercise. Take a few steps back and to the left the next trial, then move to the right and add a couple more steps after you get success with one direction.

Once you can send your dog to his crate from a couple of different distances and directions you are ready to move to the next level.

Building desire:

If you have taken your time to log lots of repetitions of the early pieces of this exercise, you should have a dog that really wants to get in his crate! If you are sure that you have that kind of enthusiasm, you can now build an even stronger desire to get in the crate by restraining your dog a little before releasing him to run to the crate.

For this part, you will want to be somewhat close to the crate since you are adding something new

to the exercise. You will also work without the leash for this.

As you are getting ready to send your dog to his crate, take hold of his collar and gently hold him back while saying, “Do you want to get in your crate?” with lots of excitement. (You want to restrain your dog and get him thinking that he really would like to get away and get in the crate because it is such a cool game!) Once you build the excitement level, say, “Get in your crate!” and release your dog. Your dog should charge into his crate in anticipation of getting his treat inside! What fun for you and your dog!

Trainer’s Tip: It is important to mix things up so your dog is always guessing and wants to play the game with you. This is achieved by varying the distance and the type of treats you use so your dog will “gamble” that it just might be the really good stuff and so that he doesn’t get bored with the same old thing. Changing the distance as you practice this exercise will also help your dog to realize it is the same game no matter where the crate is located or how close or far you are from the crate.

Now that you have a dog that wants to be in the crate, you can start adding some duration to the length of stay in the crate. Always be willing to go back to earlier steps if your dog is confused or seems to have forgotten what you are doing.

Practice this whole series of steps many times, and over a number of days before locking your dog in for prolonged periods. It is always better to start with short sessions that build up to longer ones. Better still, mix it up and do a few short sessions, a little longer one, and then go back to a short one. This will avoid a pattern that your dog will quickly figure out and may not want to play if every time the result is he gets left in the crate for a long time.

As you start to add longer times within the crate, you could stash a really special bone or a wonderfully stuffed Kong for your dog to find as his reward for going in the crate. This will give him something to do as you leave him for longer and longer periods of time.

Also remember that the rules are still the same, even when you add duration to crating. Your dog should remain in the crate as you open the door until you say “Okay.” That means no part of his body should cross the threshold of the crate. If your dog scoots or inches forward, be sure to gently close the door.

Helping your Dog

If your dog didn’t go back in his crate within the two minutes during the 1st trial of this exercise, start back at the beginning with luring him into the crate, and start over with the open door, toss in a treat portion. When you are out of treats, follow the same instructions as before and wait the 2 minutes again.

If your dog is just not getting it, stop and try again later, remembering to tell him, “All done.”

Many times, giving your dog time to process what you have been doing will result in success the next time you practice. Wait at least 20 minutes to a couple of hours before trying again.

Trainer’s Tip: Make sure your dog is hungry when you start this training, and consider the type of treats you are using, (see rank your dog’s treats later in this piece). Also make sure you have met your dog’s needs by taking him to potty, getting a drink of water, and eliminating distractions such as other dogs or children that might disturb your dog during the training. Also consider the time of day- maybe your dog just wants to rest or sleep during that part of the day and that would make training more difficult.

Negative Crate Experiences

Negative crate experiences can be very stressful and traumatic for your dog if you try to reintroduce the crate without a solid foundation of positive experiences with the crate. You will first want to identify the level of stress or fear your dog has associated with the crate in the past, and depending on the problem, you may be able to readily solve the problem with the following exercises, or you may need to work with a behaviorist or a positive reinforcement trainer to help you formulate a plan to desensitize your dog’s fear of the crate.

The following are a few of the common issues that lead to crate problems or phobias for dogs and what you might need to do to help your dog desensitize to the crate:

- .. Dog or puppy was introduced to the crate but cried and whined and pet parent abandoned its use. Dog learned that crying and whining “works!”
- .. Crate was overused and dog or puppy had accidents in crate or was left too long and became stressed from “holding it” (may need a professional behaviorist or trainer to help)
- .. Crate was not introduced as a fun and comforting place for the dog
- .. Dog was frightened while in the crate (may need a professional behaviorist or trainer to help)
- .. Crate was used as a punishment
- .. Dog has separation anxiety (may need medication and a professional behaviorist or trainer to help)

Desensitizing the crate:

Start with your dog’s top 5 food treats and the top 5 toys or games that your dog loves. (See list after this section if you are not sure)

Before you begin, read the crate training part of this guide and decide if your dog would do better in a different style of crate. Once you have made that decision, you will set the crate up in an area where the crate has not been before in case your dog has generalized the negative feelings about the crate with the location. You will want to take the door off or bungee it so it stays open until you have changed your dog’s association with the crate. The idea, for now, is to make the crate appear different, and non-threatening.

You will begin with a hungry dog and about 6-10 small treats that are a mix of treats that ranked #2-4 for the first couple sessions of training. You will switch to the #1 ranked treats, toys or games as you get closer to the crate.

Here is how to do it:

From a distance, and where your dog can remain unconcerned about the crate, you will place a treat on the floor near your feet and while the dog is eating that one, you will take one step toward the crate and place another treat on the floor near you. It's important that you place the treat near your feet so your dog learns that is where he can find food in case he worries when you start working closer to the crate. Your dog shouldn't be asked to do anything (like sit or down) - his job is simply to eat the treats you place on the floor.

Now, take a step away from the crate and place the treat on the floor and as your dog eats that one, take two steps closer to the crate and place a treat on the floor, but this time, while standing in the same place, put three or more treats, one at a time on the floor. Just as your dog finishes the last one, announce, "All done!"

Your dog should be pretty disappointed that you ended this very easy game, which is exactly what you want. The idea is that your dog thinks this is a great game and that the crate is incidental in the room.

After you say, "All done," bring out one of your dog's #2 favorite toys or play one of his #2 favorite games for a short play session then go back to training. Remember to add the, "All done," cue here as well.

This next round should include one or two of the #1 ranked food treats in your mix of 6-10 treats. Start where you left off last time and just wait for your dog to come over to see what you are up to. If he seems disinterested, you can help him along by using a kissy sound or patting your leg. The second he looks your way, place the treat on the floor near your feet and while he is eating, take one step backwards, and away from the crate. This time, wait until your dog starts to turn and see where you are then place the treat on the floor. While he is eating, take two steps toward the crate and again, wait until your dog starts to look toward you before you place the treat on the floor. Then do a rapid-fire reinforcement with the rest of your treats by placing a treat on the floor, stand up, then as soon as you are standing,

bend and place another one on the floor until you have used them all up. Announce, "All done," to your dog and play again with a #2 ranked toy or game. Then end on that note until you have at least a couple of hours between these sessions.

Leave the crate where it is and if you happen to "catch" your dog checking it out, simply say, "Good dog," to quietly acknowledge that he is doing a good thing. If you keep this low-key, he will be more willing to keep exploring which will continue to build stronger, positive associations with the crate.

By the next round of training, you should have a pretty interested dog or puppy and you can start again with the last distance, but this time step sideways, then go forward, then step back one or two steps, etc. Be sure to feed your dog on each of the steps getting closer each time to the crate. When you are 4-5 steps away from the crate, you will want to only use the #1 ranked food, toys and/or game as the rewards for each session.

Always work when your dog is hungry and allow your dog to leave if he chooses. If your dog does leave, he should come back pretty quick if you just stand still and wait. If after a minute your dog hasn't come back, simply announce, "All done," and put the food and toys away.

As you can guess, you are moving closer and closer to the crate and rewarding your dog for "choosing" to be near it. Always go at your dog's pace and never be afraid to go back to an easier step if your dog seems worried or anxious.

When you are able to have your dog walk all the way up to the crate without a problem you can then place a chair near it (if there is not one there already) and play the same game, but start by sitting in the chair and placing a treat near your feet, then stand up while the dog eats that treat and take a step so you are really close to the opening of the crate. Wait for your dog to look in your direction and place the treat at the entrance of the crate, but this time walk away and sit in the chair. As your dog looks up to find you, do the rapid-fire treats on the floor near you, one at a time until they are all gone. Announce, "All done." And play a number one ranked toy or game while

you are sitting in the chair. Now take a break with at least an hour in between.

The progression of this is to be able to walk up to the crate and toss a treat just inside the door while you walk away, then further in the crate while you walk away, then a jackpot of treats in the back of the crate while you walk away, etc. This allows the dog to process this and choose to go in the crate to get the treat without the threat of you closing the door. Eventually, you should also be able to toss his favorite toys in there and have him retrieve them out for play.

Once you have the dog happily going into the crate after the food and toys, you can walk over to the crate and close the door for a couple of seconds while he is inside eating his treats. When he is done eating the treats, open the door and walk to where you keep the #1 treats and grab a handful and walk right back to the crate and toss in a bunch and wait with your hand on the door. If your dog goes in to eat the treats, tell him, "Good dog," and close the door for just a few seconds and again, open it when he has eaten the treats.

This may take a few rounds for your dog to really feel like he can trust you not to lock him in, so go slow.

If you feel like your dog is really enjoying this game you can go back to the *Teaching your Dog to Love his Crate* section, and start from there with that training.

Eventually, you will also want to generalize your training by moving the crate around to different places and working up to actually leaving your dog in the crate for a few minutes longer each time. When you get to this point be sure to add a stuffed Kong or a Bully Stick to make being in there a really good experience.

Be sure to practice leaving your dog in the crate when you are not going anywhere. Many dogs are only put in the crate when their pet parents are leaving, which makes many dogs anxious even without the crate factor, so it's important that your dog learns that sometimes you leave when he is in the crate, and sometimes not.

If after several days and lots of reinforcements you feel your dog is still having problems, you may want to contact a positive reinforcement behaviorist or trainer to help you problem-solve this part before you move forward with crate training.

How to Rank your Dog's Rewards

Find your dog's level 1 and 2 reinforcements in the following categories: food, toys or games, and environmental activities. You will need to list everything that you think might reinforce your dog's behaviors. Once you have your list made, rate each item on a scale of 1 to 5, with #1 being the most valuable reinforcement- those would be the things that your dog gets really excited about.

Examples of food rewards:

Freeze dried liver
Chicken
Hot Dogs
Cheese
Natural Balance semi-soft food
Cooked eggs
Hamburger

Examples of toys or game rewards:

Tug-of-war
Fetch
Soccer
Squeaky toys
Frisbee
Being chased
Being petted

Final suggestions for the crate:

Be sure your dog has had some exercise (not over stimulating exercise!) and has relieved

himself before starting any training session, and before confining him for any length of time.

Never open the crate door if your dog is whining or barking unless you feel as though your dog is truly panicked. If you do, your dog will learn to bark/whine in order to be let out of his crate! If your dog seems distressed and you really feel that he needs something, wait until there is a moment of silence, or a less intense moment and then quickly open the door while saying "Okay" to release him. If you find the trend is getting worse, refer to the section on desensitizing the crate.

As you introduce the crate, you should first practice with the crate in areas when your dog is able to see you. After a few sessions, when your dog seems comfortable, then you will want to start placing the crate in other areas where he is not able to see you. Only move on to this stage when you have built a strong foundation of your dog going into the crate like it's a game. After lots of practice, you should be able to send your dog to his crate from anywhere in the house, provided you have a way to prop the crate door open. Small bungee cords work well for this!

If you pass the crate while your dog is inside and he is being quiet, drop some treats in with little or no fanfare. This will teach your dog that being quiet in the crate brings rewards!

Be careful not to teach your dog that the crate equals you leaving. Use your crate when you are home, as well as when you are going out. If your dog learns that going in his crate means you will soon leave, the crate can quickly become a source of stress for your dog. You can practice by having your dog enter the crate and spending time in there when you are not going anywhere. As you establish his comfort level, you will be able to work up to leaving your dog in for longer periods when you are at home and while you are gone.

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