



Making the Crate Great

The crate should become your best friend. It is an invaluable training tool. Picture it: a comfortable place where your pup can relax with his/her favorite toys, some delicious treats, and you can rest in the knowledge that pup is safe, unlikely to have a potty accident and is prevented from getting into things he shouldn't – like the trash! When you give the cue "kennel up", pup runs to his crate with excitement. And you can go out for dinner with friends knowing that Fido is happy in a secure home. This can and should be the relationship you and your dog have with the crate. Just a little bit of early investment will provide huge dividends in the long run.

So how to do it?

Make the crate a really comfortable place for pup.

The size of the crate should be big enough for pup to stand up in and turn around. You don't want it so big that pup can create separate sleeping and bathroom areas. Some wire crates come with an adjustable divider that can be moved to provide pup with the appropriate space. Otherwise you might be able to reduce the excess space with the help of a cardboard box.

Provide comfy bedding which can be easily washed.

Have a variety of puppy safe toys in the crate – different sizes, shapes, textures. Don't leave all of pup's toys out/in the crate – rotate them. Aim on having 20 to 30 dog toys and switch out 5 to 10 toys every 3 days.

Make the crate the place where meals are served and the best treats enjoyed. You want your pup to think of the crate like its Disney World!

Think about the location of the crate

The crate should be somewhere pup enjoys spending time – away from very busy areas of the house but close to an outside exit for easy toileting trips. A part of the house that isn't too hot or too cold, too dark or too light. Pup is going to need quiet times so somewhere he can be undisturbed is a great choice. As much as we may want to keep our beautiful new addition at our side 24 hours a day, please keep in mind that it is important for pup to get used to spending



Make sure the crate is a comfortable place for pup with a few of his favorite toys. This is a place where great stuff happens.

sometime by himself/herself. You may find it helpful to have more than one crate (maybe one upstairs, and one downstairs).

Start slowly

Don't just force puppy into the crate and shut the door. To begin with you're going to make a game of going into the crate and getting puppy used to entering the crate on his own. Toss some of pup's kibble or other tasty treat into the crate and let puppy go in, find it and then come back out if he wishes. Repeat but if pup is readily entering the crate then try tossing the treats slightly further towards the back. After 5 minutes of the game go and do something else – maybe a play in the yard.

Within an hour go back to the game and try adding a few more pieces of the kibble allowing you enough time to close the door briefly. Open it when pup finishes all of the kibble and before he starts fussing about being behind a closed door. Repeat. After 5 minutes go and do something else.

Your next crate session could be a meal time – leave puppy with the bowl (or better yet a food toy) in the crate and close the door. Stay nearby and be ready to open the door when puppy finishes his meal.

Between training sessions sprinkle treats in the crate so pup is randomly rewarded with these surprises if he/she returns in at other times.

You can gradually increase the amount of time puppy is in the crate by waiting just a little longer each time before you open the crate door. Using the longer times provided by meals you can also start to move away from the crate so pup gets used to being in there on his own. Don't go too far as you want to ensure pup never has reason to start getting worried about being alone.

Within the course of just a few hours you can build duration in the crate from minimal interaction with the crate to 20 minutes or so.

Once you've completed the above steps, you may be able to leave a tired puppy in his crate – with the aim he'll fall asleep and then be in there for a few hours.



Getting a dog comfortable in the crate means you have a safe place to confine them when you can't supervise them.

You are likely to get a little crying or whining, especially the first time puppy is put in the crate for the night. Consider whether all pup's physical needs have been met: Has he been to the bathroom? Has he had plenty of exercise? Has he had food and water? Listen carefully to the tone of the whining. A little loneliness whimpering should come to an end within a short time. If the whining/crying gets more panicked, the tone changes and you hear pup scratching at the crate sides or door, try and wait for just a few seconds of calm before letting pup out. If pup knows "sit" or "down", ask him for this behavior before opening the crate door. Then try and go out for a short bathroom break before returning to the crate. We don't want puppy to be afraid of the crate so it's important we try and keep it a really positive and happy place but at the same time we have to be incredibly careful that pup doesn't learn that if he makes a lot of noise he gets let out of the crate.

If pup is really struggling you could try having the crate next to your bed. Placing on the nightstand means you can put your fingers through the grating so pup knows you're nearby. Far better to try keeping puppy in the crate, even if it has to be in the bedroom to start, than to welcome puppy into your bed. Being closer to you may be sufficient comfort for pup. We can then build on the distance between you and the crate overnight.

If puppy really dislikes the crate and will not settle down, then the next best step is to have a small "safe zone" for puppy in front of the crate – just enough for puppy to come in and out of the crate. Not so much space that he has a lot of room for play. Ex-pens can be attached to crates to provide this additional room. You will likely need some sort of protection for the floor as more space is probably going to result in puppy using it for the bathroom. Newspaper or potty pads can be used but you'll need to keep in mind that they'll also have to be phased out of the toilet training which can make the process longer.

Very young puppies are unlikely to make it all the way through the night without having to eliminate so be ready to get them out of their crate and to the designated potty spot as quickly as possible. Afterwards it's back in the crate. Maybe leave pup with a longer lasting puppy safe treat like a bully stick.

These tips should help get you off to a great start with the crate. If puppy is really struggling then further work may be required to ensure time in the crate is a positive experience for pup. Mountainside Mutts will be happy to provide additional assistance.