

## Housebreaking and Crate Training

Dog training basics – Crate training and house training your dog or puppy

HOUSEBREAKING AND CRATE TRAINING – By Stanley Coren

Using the kennel crate method of housebreaking your puppy or dog is probably the most effective and most humane method available. It is endorsed by most veterinarians and animal behaviourists. As a side benefit the crate will also become your best method for preventing destructive behavior. In the wild, dogs are creatures that spend a lot of time in their dens. They enjoy the security of a small area of their own. The majority of dogs also have a natural instinct that keeps them from soiling their den area. This really makes crate training an easy way to housebreak dogs.

First you should choose a crate only large enough for your dog to stand up, turn around, and lie down. If the crate is too large, your dog will soil one corner and rest comfortably in another, and you will not have success housebreaking. Most people buy a crate that is large enough for the adult dog that their puppy will grow into. For this reason you may have to block off the rear of the crate so it is the correct size for the puppy, which can be done simply by inserting a cardboard box of the right size in the back of the crate. Many dogs prefer the security and privacy of plastic airline crates. Wire crates have the advantage of being collapsible for travel but you should drape a towel over the top to give the dog the illusion of privacy. The crate should be located in a quiet area. Avoid high traffic areas like kitchens, hallways and doorways. A good place is in your bedroom, where your dog can have the security of your presence at night. During the day you might want to move it into a corner of the living room.

Although most pups accept the crate easily, there are some that have to be convinced that it is a good place to be. The quickest way to teach this is with food treats. Begin by placing treats in the crate for your dog to find, and soon your dog will go into the crate on his own in search of treats. The next step is to lure your dog into the crate with a treat, giving a command. I use "In your house" while a friend of mine uses "Denning time".

For adult dogs who are just learning to use the crate, and for the occasional puppy that is insecure, it may help to gradually get them used to remaining there. At first shut the door for a few seconds, give your dog a treat and allow him out; gradually increase the time the door stays shut with your dog inside. When your dog is comfortable staying in the crate with the door shut, try leaving the room for a few moments. Return, give him a treat and let your dog out. As with the other steps, gradually increase the time away from the pet. Only stay away as long as your dog is still comfortable in the crate at first.

Especially at night it is important not to return to a whining dog to 'offer comfort'. If you do you will end up with a dog that whines and cries whenever it wants you near. Instead, return to your dog when it is quiet, and the next time return before the whining starts. In addition, try not to make returning to your dog too exciting, or you will exaggerate your absence and possibly contribute to separation anxiety in your dog. Just quietly greet him with something like "Hi pup!" Then open kennel door and quietly walk away. The most important thing to remember is the crate must be a safe haven for your dog. Never punish in the crate or use the crate for punishment. Eventually, if you leave the crate door open the pup will start to voluntarily use it for naps or quiet time. (My dogs use it to escape the frenetic attention of my youngest grandchildren).

If the pup is comfortable with the crate housebreaking is fairly straightforward. Feeding must be on a strict schedule. If you feed him at the same times each day your dog will soon eliminate on a fairly reliable schedule. This will allow you to anticipate when he will need to go outside and eliminate. Young puppies and untrained dogs need to go outside after napping or being crated for a while, since increases in activity often trigger elimination. This means that the first thing in the morning when you take him out of the crate he has to get a chance to eliminate. After a long night, puppies often can't even make it to the door before they have to go, so you may have to carry him to the door for a week or so. Sometimes just actively playing, eating or drinking large amounts of water, can also trigger elimination in a pup.

Your dog should be taken out on leash to the same designated spot each time. Choose this spot carefully. This is not walk time or play time; stand in approximately the same spot and wait for your dog to eliminate. If he does, praise him enthusiastically. Don't immediately rush back into the house with him or he will learn to hold on and not eliminate so that he can get more time outdoors. Instead walk a few minutes or give him a minute or two of playtime. Don't fully clean up the spot, but leave a trace of urine or feces to provide a scent that will remind the pup what he is supposed to do there.

You may find it useful to crate your dog or puppy whenever you can't be available to supervise it and to prevent accidents. When you are able to supervise your dog and take it out on schedule, you should be able to prevent accidents by keeping an eye on your dog. Housebreaking is for the most part owner training, where you learn your dog's schedule to avoid accidents. However, the more successful, praised elimination outside, the quicker your dog will become housebroken.

There may be an occasional "accident" in the house with young pups. If there is one don't hit him, yell at him or rub his nose in it. The dog won't make the connection between your punishment and his earlier behavior. This means the dog may learn to be afraid of you, or the simple situation where you approach him. Simply clean up the mess and then use a commercial odour eliminator (like Natures Miracle or other enzyme containing products) or simply clean the area with white vinegar. Don't use products containing ammonia, since that smells enough like urine that it actually attracts the dog to eliminate in that place again.

If you actually catch your dog in the act of eliminating inside the house, interrupt him and take him outside to the proper place (without harsh words or punishment). If he eliminates outside, praise him. Remember to be patient, some dogs take longer than others to housebreak do. If your dog is slow at housebreaking, check with your vet since dogs that are ill or suffering from parasites often have elimination problems. If you are consistent, watchful, and use the crate, the dog will usually be housebroken in couple of weeks. An occasional "accident" will usually be your fault, for leaving the pup too long, or not keeping to the routine. If so, just take a breath, clean it up, and remember that this phase of life will quickly pass.