



Paws UP! Behavior Modification Script: Crate Training

Crates are helpful devices for housetraining and containment. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, some dogs never enjoy the experience, and may even be claustrophobic, like some humans are. Be patient with the process, and if your dog is one of the few that find the crate a scary and dangerous place no matter how patient you are, find another method of containment, such as a small, gated off area. Not all dogs immediately love their crates. Here's how to teach your dog that a crate is a safe and wonderful place.

While crate training, use treats that your dog loves: salmon treats, tuna treats, peanut butter, cheese, chicken, hot dogs, etc. Try various types of treats to see what gets your dog excited. You can even spread some peanut butter or other soft food on the crate bars

If at any point during the following steps your dog appears frightened or concerned, or stops eating, you're just moving ahead too fast for your dog's comfort level. Back up to a previous step that your dog was performing well, and continue to move forward through the steps, making sure your dog is relaxed, eating and comfortable before you move on to the next step.

1. During the day tie or prop your crate door open so that it is secure if your dog should bump against it.
2. Three to five times a day throw a yummy treat or a special toy into your dog's crate. Let him enjoy the special treat and come out when he's ready. Don't shut the door just yet!
3. At other times during the day, lure your dog into his crate with a very yummy treat. Once he enters the crate, close the door for ½ second, then let him out. Do this 5-10 times.
4. Next, lure your dog into the crate by throwing in a very yummy treat. Now keep the crate door closed 2 seconds. While he's in the crate, constantly offer treats and lavish praise. Repeat this 5-10 times.
5. Gradually and randomly increase the amount of time the door is shut. Random time increases look like this, in seconds, minutes or hours:
2,2,3,2,4,3,2,3,4,3,3,4,3,5,3,4,4,3,6,5,4,5,4,5,5,4,7,5,5,6,5,7,7,8,5,6,6,8,7,7,8,6,8,9,6,9,6,9,10,10,12,12,15,10,15,12,20,15,20,15,20,25, etc. As you increase, your intervals become larger, so you can move from 20 seconds to 40 seconds to 60 seconds to 2 minutes to 4 minutes, etc.
6. Increase the value of the treat as the duration of time within the crate increases. For example, throw a handful of kibble in the crate to get the dog to go in. While the dog is in the crate for 2 minutes, for instance, drop hot dog pieces through the top or side. Food stops as soon as the crate door opens. You want to make it more rewarding for the dog to be in the crate than out of it.

7. For longer periods of time, give your dog a frozen, stuffed Kong or other food item that will take some time to consume.
8. Once your dog is comfortable being in his crate for at least 5 seconds, you can start leaving the room for very short periods of time. Start by simply backing up a few steps and coming immediately back to the crate. Praise lavishly while backing up, stop praising when coming toward the crate. Gradually increase your distance, eventually moving out of sight around a corner, and finally out the door. Gradually increase the duration of your absence. As you return to the crate, refrain from any praise and do not give your dog any treats. You want to make sure all reinforcement happens when your dog is IN the crate and you are leaving, not when you are returning and your dog is released from the crate.
9. When releasing your dog from the crate, ask him to sit, then open the door. Teach your dog to stay in a sit until you release him by repeatedly **gently** closing the door every time he tries to leave the crate, until he maintains his sit with the crate door fully open.