

Heartwood Animal Hospital

3091 Mays Crossroads Road , Youngsville, NC, 27596

Phone: (919) 570-9311

Website: www.heartwoodanimalhospital.com

Dog Behavior and Training – Crate Training

Why should I confine my dog?

Dogs are highly social animals that make wonderful pets; however, with the lifestyle and schedule of the majority of families, dogs must learn to spend a portion of the day alone at home while their human family is away. During those times when you are away and unavailable to supervise, the pet may still feel the need to chew, play, explore, eat, or eliminate. These behaviors can be very distressing and can be damaging to the home. Training the dog to spend time in a crate will prevent these undesirable or unsafe activities.



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Crate training is similar to having a child sleep in a crib or play in a playpen. Crate training may also be essential for plane travel or for housing your dog when visiting friends or family or vacationing with your dog. Crate training is one of the quickest and most effective ways to house train a dog. If you need to board your dog at a kennel, crate training can help minimize your dog's stress while being boarded. The occasional dog may not tolerate crate training, and may continue to show anxiety or even eliminate when confined. These dogs may adapt better to other types of confinement such as a pen, dog run, small room, or barricaded area.

Where do I start?

1. Obtain a crate: a metal, collapsible crate with a tray floor or a plastic traveling crate will both work, as long as the crate is large enough for the dog to stand, turn, and stretch out. Some dogs feel more secure if a blanket is draped over the crate.
2. Place the crate in a room where the family spends time such as a kitchen, den, or in a bedroom where the dog might sleep at night.

How do I crate train my puppy?

1. Introduce the puppy to the crate as soon as it is brought home and as early in the day as possible. Place a variety of treats in the cage throughout the day so that the puppy is encouraged to enter voluntarily.
2. If the puppy is tired and calm, it may take a “nap” shortly after being placed in its crate. If not, be certain to provide a few novel and stimulating toys or chews for play. In this way, the crate serves two functions – as your puppy’s bed (crib) or your puppy’s play area (playpen).
3. Leave the room but remain close enough to hear the puppy. Escape behavior and vocalization (crying, whimpering or barking) are to be expected when a dog is first placed in its crate. Ignore your puppy until the crying stops; never release the puppy unless it is quiet.
4. A brief disruption may be useful to deter crying if it does not subside on its own. A shaker can (a sealed can filled with coins or marbles) can be tossed at the crate when the pup barks. When the barking ceases, stop the disruption.
5. When your pup is calmed and quiet you can take it out and reward it with treats and play time.
6. Repeat the cage and release procedure a few more times during the day, including each naptime and each time your puppy is given a toy or chew with which to play. Each time, increase the time that the dog must stay in the crate before letting it out. Always give the puppy exercise and a chance to eliminate before securing it in the crate.
7. At bedtime, the dog should be exercised, secured in its crate, and left for the night. Do not go to the dog if it cries. Never leave the puppy in its crate for longer than it can control its bowels or bladder or it may be forced to eliminate in the crate.
8. Remember to positively reinforce your puppy’s calmed behavior in the crate and provide it with stimulation (i.e., chew toys) while inside.
9. Remember, if your puppy is still agitated in the crate after following these guidelines, stop training and consult your veterinarian for additional help.

How can I train an adult dog?

Training an adult dog is similar to training a puppy. However, it may require more time and patience. Set up the crate in the dog’s feeding area with the door open for a few days.

"Training an adult dog is similar to training a puppy."

Place food, treats, and water in the crate so that the dog enters the crate on its own. Once the dog is regularly entering the crate freely, begin closing the door for very short periods of time. Remember to follow the same principles as puppy crate training, as listed above.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by: Debra Horwitz, DVM, DACVB & Gary Landsberg, DVM, DACVB, DECAWBM
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