



CRATE TRAINING GUIDE

CRATE TRAINING MADE
EASY: HELPING YOUR DOG
FEEL SAFE AND HAPPY

Crate Training Guide

I have put together an 8-step crate training schedule, but first here's some valuable information you need to consider and understand to successfully crate train your dog or puppy. This background will help ensure your dog sees their crate as a safe, comfortable space they love.

By understanding the 'why' and 'how' of crate training first, you'll set your dog up for success and make the step-by-step schedule much easier to follow.

This guide works for both puppies and adult dogs. While some sections include things like toilet training tips that may not be necessary for older dogs, the overall structure, concepts, and principles are fully applicable to dogs of all ages, so please make sure you read it all and don't skip bits.



UNDERSTANDING THE DEN INSTINCT

Dogs have a natural denning instinct which is why they often crawl under tables or squeeze behind furniture. Enclosed spaces make them feel safe and secure, helping them to decompress and lower their alertness to the outside world.

A crate taps into that instinct. When introduced positively, it becomes a den-like retreat where your dog can rest, relax, and reset. Covering it, or placing it in a dark room can make it feel even more cosy and secure.

Remember:

- Crate training is not about punishment or confinement.
- It's a valuable training tool that helps prevent issues like separation anxiety, destructive behaviour, and over-excitement.
- It's especially helpful for anxious, fearful, or high-energy dogs, as it provides a designated calm zone where they can self-regulate.

When done right, crate training teaches your dog that their crate is their safe place, their den within your home.

Getting Started: Start as you mean to go on..

When bringing a new puppy home, start crate training immediately, even from day one.

This might sound strict, but it's one of the most effective ways to raise a confident, independent dog who's comfortable being alone.

Here's what that looks like:

- Begin by leaving your puppy for very short periods, even just a few minutes while you step into another room or the garden.
- The goal is not to leave them for long, but to normalise short absences and show them that you always come back.
- Over time, this creates a calm, confident dog who can settle alone without distress.

When they're very young, these short absences are also practical as their bladders are tiny, and they can't hold it for long.

The same concept applies to adult dogs, short crate sessions during the day (5, 10, or 20 minutes) while doing simple tasks like washing dishes, scheduled naps, or short absences will help the dog see the crate as a normal part of daily life, not just a place for long periods of alone time.

Puppy Tip Using a portable crate helps your puppy learn that the crate is part of everyday life, not just for bedtime or when you go out.

When raising your puppy, try to be proactive and take their crate to different places:

- To work if appropriate
- In the car during travel
- To friends'/family houses for coffee or dinner

This will help them learn to settle in their crate no matter where we were.

Building Duration Naturally

Forget the strict “add five minutes per day” schedules, instead, let your dog set the pace.

At first, you might leave for just a quick errand. Gradually, as your dog shows comfort, extend that time. For example:

- At 8–10 weeks: a few minutes at a time
- By 4 months: many puppies can rest calmly in their crate for around four hours.

You can use a camera to monitor their comfort and body language. Look for:

- Relaxed posture
- Sleeping or calmly resting
- No excessive whining or scratching

Once you consistently see calm behaviour, you can safely increase duration.

Let comfort guide progress, not the clock. Extend time in the crate gradually and naturally, never force it. Each calm departure and return teaches your dog that being alone is normal, temporary, and safe. Dogs raised this way rarely develop separation anxiety, because alone time is simply a familiar, positive part of their routine.

Preventing Separation Issues

Many dog breeds, particularly Malinois, working spaniels, and shepherds, are naturally energetic and highly attached to their humans, which can make them more prone to separation-related issues. For these dogs, learning to be comfortable alone is an essential life skill.

The key to preventing separation anxiety is structured independence. Puppies who are never left alone never learn that being on their own is safe and normal. By introducing early, gentle periods of separation, you're helping your puppy build confidence, emotional resilience, and a sense of security in their own space.

In practical terms:

- Don't feel guilty for leaving your puppy briefly. Short separations are healthy and teach them that your departures are temporary.
- Avoid constant contact. While cuddles and attention are important, too much can create over-dependency and make alone time stressful.
- Use the crate strategically. When introduced positively, the crate becomes a safe haven where your puppy learns to relax independently, fostering calm, confident behaviour.

By guiding your puppy toward independent comfort early, you're setting them up for a lifetime of emotional stability and fewer worries when you're out of sight.

Bedding and Comfort

Not every puppy can safely have soft bedding early on and that's ok.

Start Simple

- Begin with something like vet bedding - soft, durable, and washable.
- Avoid overfilling the crate with blankets or toys. Too much fabric encourages chewing and can hide accidents.

If your puppy leaves the bedding alone for a few weeks, you can slowly upgrade to something softer. If they chew or shred, go back to basics.

Safety First:

Chewing or swallowing bedding can cause blockages.

A bare crate floor is far safer than a padded one your puppy might eat.

Breed Considerations

- Thick-coated dogs (like Shepherds, Malinois, Mountain breeds) often prefer a cool, solid surface.
- Short-coated dogs (like Boxers, Staffies) usually appreciate more padding.

Observe your dog and adapt accordingly.

Crate Setup and Placement

Less Is More

As per the previous page, avoid overloading the crate with bedding, toys, and cushions. Keep it minimal until your dog is crate reliable.

Ideal Placement

Many owners put the crate in a busy spot like the kitchen or living room. While this feels “inclusive,” it actually makes rest harder.

Puppies need calm and quiet to relax. Start in a peaceful room, the bedroom is often best for early stages. You can move later.

Benefits of bedroom placement:

- You can respond to whining or toilet needs quickly in the night.
- Your puppy feels safe knowing you're nearby.
- You prevent distress and build early trust.

For puppies, you can use a playpen in the evenings while you're relaxing and watching TV to keep them close, or a travel crate if you prefer.

For older dogs who are accustomed to sleeping in a bed and can comfortably make it through the night without needing a toilet break, the placement of the crate is less critical. Placing it in the bedroom is usually only necessary if your dog tends to whine or get unsettled during the night.

Responding to Night-Time Whining

There's still a common myth that you should leave puppies to 'cry it out' at night, sometimes even to the point of putting them in another room and wearing earplugs. Personally, I couldn't disagree more.

Not only will it annoy your neighbours.. but when your puppy cries in the night, it's usually for a reason. Most often, they need the toilet or they're feeling insecure. Ignoring them not only causes unnecessary stress but can damage the early bond you're building.

Here's what I'd do instead:

Set up the crate next to my bed. When I go to sleep, I'd wait for them to settle. During the night, I hear them stir, whine, or even just shuffle, I'd quietly get up, pick them up, carry them outside for a toilet break, and then calmly pop them straight back in the crate.

This teaches two incredibly important lessons:

1. Communication works, they learn they can get your attention without panicking.
2. Toileting happens outside, even in the middle of the night.

It's a calm, trust-building routine that sets you both up for success.

Night-Time Routine and Toilet Training

During the initial nights, it's usually best to pre-empt night wakes by setting an alarm for a middle-of-the-night toilet break, even if your puppy hasn't stirred yet. This helps prevent accidents, keeps their routine consistent, and gives you a clearer picture of their bladder capability.

A simple way to phase this out gradually:

- Nights 1–3: Bedtime around 11pm, wake them for a toilet break at 3am.
- Next few nights: Push the alarm to 4am.
- Then: Move it to 5am.
- Finally: 6am, until your puppy is comfortably sleeping through.

If your puppy wakes and cries before the alarm, always go to them, that usually means they genuinely need to go. But if they're consistently snoozing through your set time, you can stretch the gap a little further each night.

Every pup is different, so don't rush the process. Their bladder strength develops at its own pace, and the aim is simply to support them while they learn.

Managing Night-Time Toilet Trips

When you do take your puppy out during the night, keep the interaction as calm and neutral as possible. This is not playtime, it's business.

- Quietly lift them from the crate and carry them outside.
- Use their toilet cue (e.g. 'wee, wees' or 'go toilet').. if you haven't got one teach one!!
- Wait calmly while they go.
- Softly praise them ('good boy/girl'), then carry them straight back to the crate.

And that's it. No cuddles, no chatting, no playtime.

Gradually Moving the Crate

Once your puppy is sleeping soundly through the night and no longer needs toilet trips, you can start moving the crate away from your bed bit by bit.

- First, move it from beside the bed to the end of the bed.
- Then across the room.
- Then just outside the bedroom door.
- On the landing etc
- Eventually, to the final spot where you want them to sleep long-term, maybe a hallway, lounge or kitchen.

Take this process slowly. If you notice any signs of stress, move the crate back closer for a few nights and try again later. The goal is to build confidence, not create anxiety.

If you plan to move the crate to another level of the house (for example, from upstairs to downstairs), expect the process to take a little longer, perhaps up to two months if you want to be gentle and avoid setbacks.

That said, some puppies can handle the move within a week. It's all about reading your dog, not following a strict schedule.

Handling Vocalisation

Crying, whining, or barking are common, but understanding why is key.

Common Causes:

- Need to toilet
- Discomfort (too hot/cold)
- Frustration or not wanting to be alone

How to Respond:

- If it's a genuine need, respond promptly.
- If it's protest, wait for a quiet pause before opening the crate.
- Never release a puppy while they're screaming, this reinforces noise = freedom.

Preventing Vocalisation:

- Introduce the crate early, make it routine from day one.
- Keep it positive, meals, chews, and calm play in/around it.
- Meet their needs first, toilet, exercise, and mental stimulation.
- Create the right environment, quiet, dark, away from chaos.
- Don't let screaming earn release, wait for a pause.

If all needs are met and your puppy is just protesting, letting them cry briefly is ok.

Breed & Temperament:

Some breeds (Shepherds, Terriers, working lines) are naturally vocal and may need extra desensitisation.

Notice the signs early and respond before they escalate. This helps your puppy learn that calm behaviour gets results, while panic does not. If your puppy becomes extremely distressed, biting bars or scratching frantically, take a step back and gradually rebuild their comfort with the crate.

Building Value in the Crate

Your dog should love their crate. Every good thing should happen there.

1. Teach “Go to Crate”

Use free shaping:

1. Reward movement toward the crate.
2. Then reward stepping in.
3. Then lying down calmly.
4. Add a cue (“crate” or “bed”) once reliable.

This becomes a powerful impulse control and management tool.

2. Feed in the Crate

Feed meals and treats inside the crate.

- **Leaving the house?** Toss a handful of kibble into the crate.
- **Car crate or travel crate?** Sprinkle food in there too.
- **Quiet time or naps?** Let them settle in with a small scatter of food.

This builds positive association: Crate = comfort, calm, food, safety.

3. Reserve Special Chews - *Always supervise when possible and remove chews when they're finished.*

Only give high-value chews, Lickimats, frozen carrots, Kongs inside the crate. This creates a ‘treasure chest’ effect, the crate becomes where all the best things happen.

4. Play Crate Games

- **Crate Toss:** Toss treat in, close door briefly, open again.
- **Distance Send:** Cue ‘crate’ from further away each time.
- **Find the Food:** Hide treats inside for them to discover.

5. Safety Reminders

Avoid leaving:

- collars on
- Soft toys or blankets (chewing risk)
- Hard bones or antlers
- Towels or loose covers

If using a cover, ensure it's snug, breathable, and safe. You can buy proper crate covers.

Other Considerations

Choosing the Right Crate

Plastic vs Wire Crates

- Plastic crates: safer, darker, more den-like - ideal for puppies and anxious dogs.
- Wire crates: fine for calm, trained adults but may overstimulate young dogs.

Plastic crates encourage natural rest and are safer for chewers.

Light, Noise, and the Rest Environment

Dogs rest best in a dark, quiet environment.

When your puppy is small, keep their crate area:

- Dimly lit or darkened
- Calm and quiet
- Consistent (you can use white noise or a soft fan sound)

As they get older and more confident:

- Introduce background sounds like the radio, music, or household chatter.
- This helps them learn to settle even when life happens around them.

Gradually exposing your puppy to noise builds resilience. It means they'll still be able to rest when staying somewhere new, visiting friends, or when guests are over.

Crate Training for Older Dogs

Crate training isn't just for puppies. Adult dogs benefit too, especially those who struggle to relax or are easily overstimulated.

Creating a calm, dark crate space allows them to fully decompress and switch off.

The 8 Step Guide



Crate Training Guide

The schedule suggests waiting until Step 6 to close the crate door, but if your dog is comfortable and doesn't react negatively, feel free closing it earlier as this will help with leaving them in the crate sooner.

If Steps 1–6 are followed properly, Steps 7 and 8 should feel easy, or not needed at all. Give it a try and see how your dog responds! With consistency, patience, and the right setup, your dog will soon love their crate as a safe, calm space to relax, rest, and enjoy some well-earned alone time.

SCHEDULE

Step 1	<p>This is all about building a positive, pressure-free introduction. The aim is to get your dog comfortable moving in and out of the crate using their food or treats. Start by placing food just outside or at the entrance, then gradually toss pieces further in, especially toward the back to encourage them to step inside. You can even drop pieces through the top of the crate. Let your dog explore at their own pace, coming and going freely, and focus on making the crate a rewarding and safe space. With consistency, your dog will start associating the crate with good things and happily go in on their own. Repeat this for all meals, however many times they eat. For puppies on 3 or 4 meals a day 1 day should be enough, for older dogs on 2 meals, I'd recommend 2 days.</p>
Step 2	<p>Next step focuses on building comfort with longer periods inside the crate by feeding your dog their meals inside it. Place the food bowl at the back of the crate so your dog has to fully enter to eat. Keep the door open, allowing them to come out when they're done. If needed, position the crate lengthways to encourage full entry. This step helps your dog associate extended time in the crate with positive experiences, reinforcing the idea that the crate is a rewarding and safe space. Feed all meals in the crate. Again if working with an older dog on 2 meals, I'd recommend repeating this step.</p>
Step 3	<p>Step 3 focuses on encouraging your dog to spend longer, enjoyable periods in the crate. A great way to do this is by using a frozen Kong filled with something your dog loves, such as meat pâté. Freezing it helps it last longer, keeping them occupied. Place the frozen Kong at the back of the crate and allow your dog to go in and out freely, don't shut the door yet. If your dog takes the Kong out to enjoy elsewhere, simply retrieve it and place it back inside the crate. Repeat this as needed to help them learn that the Kong is to be enjoyed in the crate. Aim to do this two or three times throughout the day. For bigger, stronger dogs a more robust kong or something like a 'Fenrir Hammer Dog Toy' is a good option.</p>
Step 4	<p>Using a foraging mat (also called a snuffle mat) is a great way to activate your dog's nose and provide a different type of enrichment inside the crate. Some dogs prefer this over a Kong, and both options help build strong, positive associations with being in the crate. You can get snuffle mats on Amazon for a relatively low price, or even use something similar that encourages your dog to sniff and search for food. Simply scatter small treats, bits of cheese, or their regular kibble throughout the mat and place it inside the crate, ideally toward the back to encourage full entry. Let your dog go in and out freely while they forage. The goal is to create a calm, enjoyable experience that encourages them to stay in the crate for longer periods. This helps build that all-important positive link between the crate and good things happening inside it. Aim to do this two or three times throughout the day.</p>
Step 5	<p>The "Access Game" – Building Crate Desire In this step, we shift focus to building strong desire and excitement for entering the crate using a game-based approach. Take one of the high-value items from previous days and place it inside the crate, but keep the crate door closed with your dog outside. Let your dog see and smell the reward inside, but create a short delay before giving access. This builds anticipation and emotional investment, your dog becomes desperate to get in. You're essentially "removing access" and making the crate the most desirable place. Start with brief delays (10–30 seconds), then gradually increase up to a few minutes across repetitions. Your dog may paw, spin, or look to you for help - that's good. It means the crate has become a wanted destination. When the anticipation is built up, open the door and allow your dog to go in and enjoy the reward. Whether they fully enter or just partially, the goal is to associate the crate with something they want access to.</p>

Step 6	<p>Now that your dog's excited about going into the crate, it's time to start introducing short periods with the door closed.</p> <p>Once they're happily going in, start by closing the door for just a second, then open it straight away and reward as they come out. Repeat this a few times until they're relaxed about the door moving.</p> <p>Next, start to build the time the door stays closed, a few seconds at first, then a little longer. You can work on this over a day or two, mixing in short sessions and keeping things calm and positive.</p> <p>When your dog is comfortable with that, try stepping just a bit away from the crate for a few seconds before coming back to let them out and reward. Gradually increase the distance.</p> <p>Always make sure they're calm before you open the door.</p>
Step 7	<p>Step 7 covers an advancement to closing the door, along with dealing with any vocalisation.</p> <p><u>Three Training Sessions</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Session 1 – Door Closed + Reward + Sit with Them <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Put the dog in the crate with their favourite reward (e.g., frozen Kong, foraging mat). o Shut the door. o Sit beside the crate for 10–15 minutes. 2.Session 2 – Door Closed, No Reward + Sit with Them <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Same structure, but no reward inside the crate. o Sit next to the crate again for 10–15 minutes. o This session may trigger barking or whining, since the dog is in the crate without a positive distraction. 3.Session 3 – Door Closed, No Reward + Move Around <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Dog is in the crate without reward again. o You move around the room, creating mild distance. o Be ready to quickly correct any undesirable behaviours (see below). <p><u>How to Correct Barking or Crying:</u></p> <p>If your dog starts whining or barking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give a firm “shush” and tap/lightly bang once on top or side of the crate. • The sound should interrupt the behaviour without scaring the dog. • When the dog calms down, reward calm behaviour with praise or a treat. • If they repeat the behaviour, repeat the correction immediately. • Timing is key: correct as soon as the behaviour begins. <p>Important: Don't physically punish the dog. The correction is only to get their attention and reset their state of mind.</p> <p><u>Exiting the Crate – Calmly and with Control:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never let your dog rush out. • Open the door slowly, and if they try to bolt, close it again quickly and firmly. • Wait for calm behaviour and eye contact. • Use a release cue like “Break” to let them out calmly. <p><u>Expected Results:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If Steps 1–6 were done well, most dogs adapt calmly and quickly. • By the end of Step 7, your dog should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Be comfortable in the crate with the door closed. o Understand that quiet behaviour is rewarded. o Learn that calmness is the key to getting out.
Step 8	<p><u>Step 8 Crate and beyond:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setup Changes: Unlike Day 7, now leave the room, out of the dog's sight, but remain connected to the crate using a long line with a metal clip to simulate the sound of correction (metal-on-metal) if needed. • Training Sessions (Same as Day 7): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dog gets something to do in the crate (e.g., toy or food). 2. Dog gets nothing (goal: build calm with no distractions). 3. Longer duration alone time (~30 mins), building tolerance. • Correcting Behaviour: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o If the dog starts crying or barking, use the long line to rattle the crate and issue a firm “shush,” even from another room. o This teaches the dog that unwanted behaviour is still monitored and corrected even when alone. <p><u>Consistency is Key:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To help the dog settle in the crate, it's important to be consistent. Short crate sessions during the day (5, 10, or 20 minutes) while doing simple tasks like washing dishes, scheduled naps, or short absences will help the dog see the crate as a normal part of daily life, not just a place for long periods of alone time.

Night time Schedule Detail

Puppies only

I suggest crating your dog overnight starting from day one. Some vocalisation at bedtime is normal, so plan for it and let your neighbours know, although it should not become too loud. Make sure children are settled and resist the temptation to reward unsettled behaviour by allowing your puppy to sleep on your bed, as adorable as that might be.

Before bedtime, make sure your puppy has had several toilet breaks and remove water a few hours before bed. Spend some time close together so your puppy feels calm and secure. Keep everything you might need nearby so you can stay close if necessary.

Place your puppy in the crate and close the door. Follow your usual bedtime routine, turn off the lights, and get into bed. Some vocalisation is normal and there is no need to respond. Stay calm, quiet, and nearby. Most puppies will settle within ten minutes. If needed, a gentle “shhh” or a soft tap on the top of the crate can help reassure them.

Young puppies may need toilet breaks during the night, set your alarm to preempt any accidents and respond to their vocalising by taking them outside and then returning them to the crate each time. Keep interactions minimal without talking or fussing, so they learn to remain calm and independent.

Adults dogs only

Avoid crating your dog overnight straight away, particularly if they have had any negative experiences with the crate. However, you can still place the crate in the room where they usually sleep and line it with their preferred bedding, encouraging them to sleep in there with the door open. Over the next few days you can gauge how comfortable they are in their crate and begin to close the door.

THANK YOU!



If you'd like extra support, whether in-person, online, or just having someone to keep you accountable I'm here to help. Reach out anytime, I'd love to help you and your dog make progress.

I'd also love to hear about your successes, big or small! Share your wins, or tag me in your social media updates and pictures, I'd love to celebrate with you.