



Paw Prints

Resource sheet: Crate training 101

Should I crate train my dog?

Getting your dog used to a crate can help with potty training, give your dog a safe place of her own, prevent destructive chewing when she is alone and provide a regular sleeping spot.

Not all dogs are good candidates for crate training. If you would need to crate your dog for longer than six hours at a time, if she has a history of soiling crates, or if she has chewed her way out of a crate in the past, you may want to consider confinement in a small room instead of a crate.

An ounce of prevention...

Dogs are creatures of habit. The more your dog repeats a behavior, the better he will get at it (practice makes perfect!). Fixing a problem behavior is often as simple as preventing the dog from repeating the behavior and then teaching him a different, more socially acceptable behavior. For example, if your dog chews furniture, crating him when you can't supervise him, and then giving him plenty of appropriate chew toys to show him what he's allowed to chew, might be enough to solve the problem.

My crate is a good place

Dogs should enjoy being in their crates, and consider them a safe place where good things happen. To help your dog get used to his crate, start by having the crate in an area where the family spends the most time with the dog (living room?). Leave the door open (or remove it temporarily if it swings shut on its own), put comfortable bedding inside, and put some toys and treats inside. Don't try to encourage your dog to go into the crate – that makes some dogs nervous. Instead, make sure he knows the good stuff is inside, and then leave him to explore on his own.

Every time you bring home a new toy or give a good treat, put it in the crate. Try stuffing a Kong toy once or twice a day and put it inside the crate. Once your dog seems comfortable with the crate (this may take a week or longer with some dogs), then shut the door (but don't latch it), feed the dog a couple of treats through the door and then open it again.

Gradually increase the amount of time the door is closed, working up to latching it for a minute or two and then for longer periods of time. Make sure your dog stays comfortable with the crate during this process.

Once your dog is happy with his crate, start leaving him inside, with a great toy (Kong with peanut butter and kibble?) and the door latched, and leave for short periods of time. When you return, let him out (if he is barking, wait until he stops before opening the door), then go about your business as if crating is no big deal.

If you put in the work in advance to help your dog like his crate, you will avoid hours of retraining.

Location, location, location

Dogs do best in crates that are in comfortable, familiar areas. If the room is too warm or cold for the dog, or too isolated from family contact, your dog will likely take much longer to accept the crate. Living rooms and family rooms are the most common locations for crates. If your dog will sleep in her crate, you might find that moving the crate to the bedroom for sleeping (or getting a second crate that stays in the bedroom), will stop any nighttime barking that may happen when you crate your dog at night. Hearing or seeing you at night helps comfort many dogs, especially puppies who are still learning how to be alone.

Lake Mills Veterinary Clinic offers behavioral services for a variety of training problems that may come up with your dog. Please ask our staff for more information.