

# CRATE TRAINING 101



So you just brought home your cute new puppy and have been told by your vet that you need to crate train your puppy. But what exactly does that mean and how do you go about it? What follows is a step-by-step guide to crate training a puppy up to adulthood.

## STEP 1. CHOOSING THE RIGHT CRATE

I recommend the standard wire crates that are sold at most pet stores and online. They should include a divider (more on that in a minute), and a tray at the bottom that slides out for easy cleaning. Purchase the size crate that will fit your dog at his or her adult size. What is the right fit? Your dog should have enough room to enter the crate, stand up, turn around, and that is it. If the crate is too big then your puppy will have enough room to soil one corner and sleep in the other. Dogs are naturally averse to soiling their sleeping area, and this is why the crate is such a powerful potty-training tool. Use the divider that came with your crate to keep the crate the right size for your dog as he or she grows.

## STEP 2. MAKE IT COZY

Dogs are denning animals and are well suited to curling up in a small space, but that doesn't mean every puppy will love being closed in right away! Make sure the crate is a warm and cozy spot for your pup. It should be a safe and inviting place that your dog should be comfortable in. Old blankets or towels make excellent bedding for an 8-16-week-old puppy. Once they are older (and done teething) you can spring for a comfy bed or pad. Sometimes a cover for the crate helps dogs to feel more secure and calm and can help them settle down.

## STEP 3. KEEP IT POSITIVE

Your dog will learn to love the crate (some quicker than others), and in order to ensure this, it is important to remember that crate time should never be used as punishment. Whenever you are leaving your puppy alone in the crate for an extended period of time, be sure to include a toy to chew on and a high value, preferably long-lasting treat. Bully sticks and Kongs stuffed with peanut butter are great. I also recommend you teach your dog to go into the crate on command. Using treats as positive reinforcement, this both makes going in the crate fun and rewarding for your dog and puts you in control of the behavior. I practice this with all of my clients on day one. It is that important.

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## STEP 4. WHEN TO USE THE CRATE

I am a strong believer in crate training for life. Puppies will need to be in the crate at night for potty training purposes, and adult dogs should be crated when no one is home. Puppies also should be crated when they cannot be closely supervised. There is some variance depending on age and size, but let's break it down in stages.

8 to 12 weeks old: Your puppy is very cute and very small. That means a small bladder and not a lot of control over it. At this age, if your puppy wakes you up in the middle of the night, take it out. If they cry just when you put them in the crate, it should be ignored.

12 to 16 weeks old: Hopefully by this point, your puppy has had one or two nights where they sleep for 6 consecutive hours. This is a sign that they are learning to hold it. Once you see this progress you can start to ignore the 3am wake up cry when it happens.

16 to 26 weeks old: At this stage, your dog should be starting to signal during the day when it needs to go outside and should be capable of holding it 6 to 8 hours at night. Of course, the first order of business in the morning is a quick walk but they really should be well on their way to being properly crate trained and house broken by 6 months of age.

6 months and older: Your dog isn't perfect but is mostly house trained and is consistently making it through the night. You can now try letting them sleep wherever you want. A bed in the kids' room, at the end of your bed, wherever. If they start having accidents at night or getting in to trouble, it's back to the crate. However, if they are peacefully sleeping then it is perfectly ok to let them be with the family at night.

I have done my best to include as much information as possible in this guide, but it is by no means fully comprehensive. The internet can be a great source of information and I recommend checking out [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org) for all things dog related.

## **JIM IDDENDEN**

Professional Dog Trainer

 (610) 724-8040

 iddenden@gmail.com

 @westportdogwhisperer

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