



CRATE TRAINING

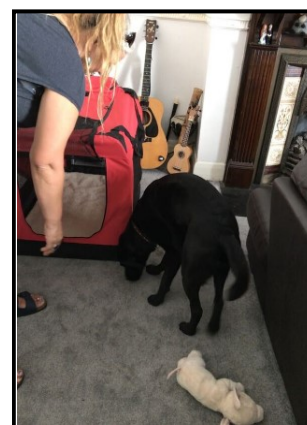
Crate training can be a very useful way to give your dog a comfortable den all of their own where they can relax and enjoy feeling safe. Crates can also be useful when travelling with your dog, or should they ever need to be confined during recovery from surgery or following an accident. Teaching your dog to enjoy spending time alone within a crate, even when you don't really need them to, means that whenever you do need to use a crate they will already be comfortable doing so! Most dogs quickly and easily learn to love having their own special space to chill out in!

Choosing a crate - types and sizes

- Crates can be made of fabric, metal or plastic and are often collapsible and lightweight, so are easily portable. Choose a design you can easily set up and carry.
- Your dog should be able to stand up, turn around, lie down and stretch out inside their crate, so make sure the crate you choose is large enough for them to be comfortable inside.
- You can cover the top and sides of the crate with a blanket for added cosiness and to prevent draughts and muffle out noises too.

Setting up and introducing your dog to the crate

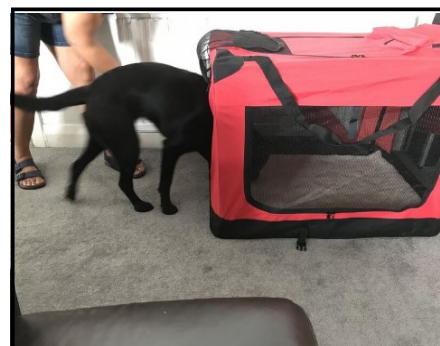
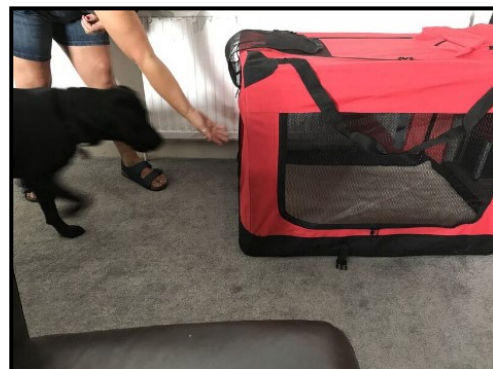
- Set the crate up as though you're simply adding a new piece of furniture to the room, so that your dog can become used to it being there. Place some comfy bedding and a few of your dog's toys and chews inside. Non-spill water bowls are useful for longer periods. Ensure that the door is fixed open safely so that while they're learning all about the crate there's no risk of him becoming shut inside accidentally.
- At this stage just let your dog do what they want! They might be curious about the crate, particularly because some of their fun things are inside it, and might investigate by sniffing around it, or they might be brave and venture inside!
- Have some treats ready so that if they do go inside you can throw them a couple to celebrate! If they appear a little shy about venturing inside then simply throw them some treats whenever they are near the crate, or if they sniff it or look at it – this way they'll start to associate the crate with nice things happening to them!
- Don't try to lure them or force them in at this point, let them decide when they feel ready to explore so they can be confident about their decision to investigate, and can trust that we're there to help them not to put any pressure on them!



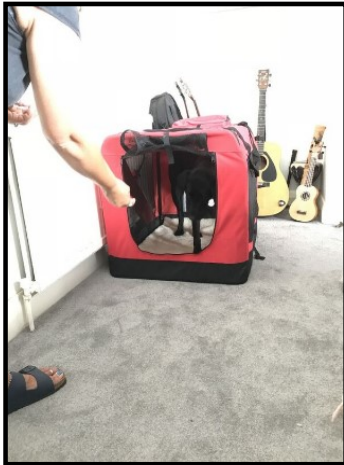
- During the introduction and early stages of training your dog needs to know they can come out of the crate quickly and easily, so they feel safe at all times and knows there's an exit! This will give them confidence and help to create the positive feeling we want them to associate with being inside the crate.

Teaching your dog to enjoy going into their crate

- Once your dog appears used to the sight and smell of the crate and isn't at all bothered by it being there – they might even have explored inside – you can start to actively encourage them to spend longer inside, knowing they are still safe to freely come and go as they please. How quickly you progress will depend on how your dog feels about things, so always going at their pace means they can remain confident while they are learning.
- Keep training sessions short and fun, a few repetitions at each stage is fine so they are always interested and enjoying themselves!
- Teach them during naturally quieter and calmer times of the day, when they've been out for a walk, had a play and are naturally ready to relax.
- Start by preparing some extra tasty treats and throw them out into the room one at a time for your dog to chase after and eat. Once they start running after the treats and enjoying this game, throw one just into the crate so they run in to eat it and then come straight back out to see where you are going to throw the next one.
- Continue throwing treats both out into the room and also into the crate so they never know where they're going to end up and remain interested in this game! If your crate has an option to open a section in its top then you might find it helps to have this open so you can easily drop treats in through the roof!
- As you throw a treat into the crate, once your dog is repeatedly running straight in happily after it, you can start to say "in your bed" at the same time as you throw the treat. Your dog will associate these words with them running into the crate to get the treat. They will be learning that whenever they hear these words the quicker they get into the crate the better, as a treat is heading that way!! Now you can start to say the words *just before* throwing in the treat. If your dog has made the connection they should start to move towards the crate as soon as you speak, so they've learned to follow your spoken instruction and should go into the crate whenever you say, "in your bed"!



- If your dog is struggling with this and appears reluctant to go into the crate to eat the treat, then make it very easy for them. Make sure the treat is just at the doorway to begin with and remain at this stage for a while to build up their confidence before throwing the treat just a little way further in.



- Once they're happily zooming into the crate to find and eat the treat, then coming out again to chase the next treat across the room, throw the next treat right back into the crate so they have to go straight back in to find it.
- Then throw the very next treat into the crate, so again they have to turn and go straight back in to find it. Now carry on throwing treats for them, but only into the crate! Your dog should soon realise that they'll be wasting time and energy coming back out of the crate and might just start to linger inside now, rightly expecting you to throw the next treat into the crate!

- You can also use toys to show your dog the crate is fun. If your dog particularly enjoys playing fetch or hide and seek for his toys, then you can throw them into the crate for them to find or fetch!
- After playing this game a number of times, when your dog will happily run right inside the crate and wait there for you to throw in their next treat (or toy!), your dog should feel very happy being inside, with the door still secured open so they can easily come out if they want to. Now you can start to build up the length of time they remain happily inside!

Building up the time your dog happily spends in his crate

By your gradual and careful introduction, you will have started to create a positive association for your dog with being inside the crate, and they should be confident enough to continue with their training.

The next stages of crate training increase in difficulty, because you will need to teach them that the door closes while they are inside. We want them to feel confident about this so they don't feel distressed and panic. Take things steadily - if at any stage your dog shows any sign of worry, such as whining or scrabbling to get out, then just go back to a stage of training during which they were confident and doing well. Spend a bit of time repeating this stage to build their confidence before gently trying to move on again.

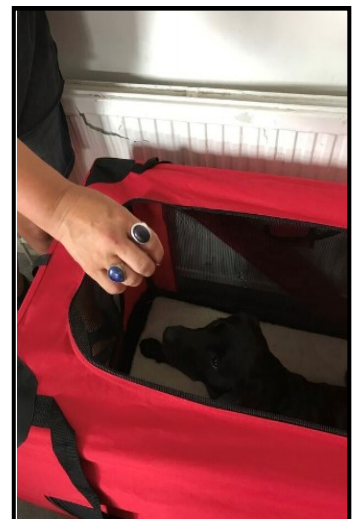
Contact your nearest Dogs Trust Dog School via [DogsTrust.ie/DogSchool](https://www.dogs-trust.ie/DogSchool) for advice if necessary – they'll be happy to help you!

- **MEAL TIMES IN THE CRATE!** You can start to feed your dog their usual meals inside his crate, as this is an easy way to teach them to enjoy spending 'as long as it takes them to eat their meal' inside the crate! Simply place their bowl of food inside and then let them go in to eat it! If your dog appears a little unsure you can start placing the bowl by the door but then progress to gradually moving it right to the back of the crate. At this stage you will still have the door secured open, so your dog can come straight back out after eating.

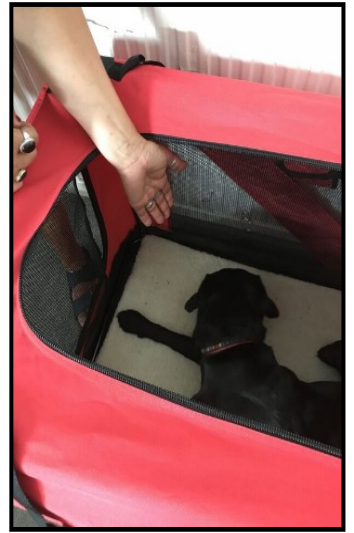


- Once they're enjoying eating their meals in the crate, increase the challenge for your dog by placing their bowl inside then slightly closing the door so it rests slightly ajar (metal/plastic) or flaps loosely down (fabric). Now your dog knows their tasty meal is inside the crate, so they'll need to make an effort to nose or paw the door open - or look up at you to get you to open the door - so they can get inside to eat!

- Now you can start to gently push the door to a closed position while they are inside and enjoying his meal. Start by just resting the door ajar (metal/plastic) or having the flap hang down (fabric) so that it will still easily and readily open should your dog suddenly wish to come out. Your dog will be aware that the door is closing but is rewarded for staying inside by enjoying their tasty meal.
- Once your dog is eating their meals in the crate without any signs of concern at all when you push the door back, start to secure the door closed while they are still eating. This enables them to get used to the sound of the door being shut and associate this with the enjoyment of eating their tasty meal. After they are finished eating they might want to come straight out of the crate, so be prepared with some more extra tasty treats and simply throw these into the crate (through the bars or top opening) so that they realise that, even though their meal has finished, remaining inside the crate is a good idea as more treats are coming! Drop a handful in and then open the door and let them out, but pop the treats away now, making sure they only get treats when they're inside the crate!



- Now you can build up the length of time he spends in the crate with the door shut after eating his meals. Do this by eking out the time between dropping in treat after treat once your dog has finished his meal, so that he is remaining in the crate for longer while he waits for the next treat to be delivered. The aim is to drop a treat in for him when he is calm and quiet, because this is the behaviour we want when he's in his crate!
- You can gradually build up the length of time your dog is calmly lounging within their crate, dropping a treat in to them randomly every so often during this time. By this stage you should be seeing them visibly relax, knowing they're in a good place and that good things happen here!



- Once they're remaining calm and relaxed for a short period in their crate with the door closed after a meal, you can open the door and place in a food-releasing toy or chew for them to enjoy. This way they'll learn that someone reaching into their crate is a good thing and they'll be rewarded for staying inside for even longer.
- You can also use other feeding methods entirely, as well as their food bowl, to build up the time your dog spends in their crate with the door closed. Tough rubber toys designed to be filled with food that your dog can take time to lick out, or long-lasting tasty chews can be given to your dog within the crate, with the door closed, to give them different opportunities to enjoy spending more time within their crate.

- When your dog is enjoying themselves inside the crate, or calmly waiting to see if you deliver another treat, start to engage in your own normal day-to-day activity so they learn that you can be active yourself while they stay in the crate.



- At all other times when you're not training them, you can leave the crate door secured open so that they can come and go as they please.
- By now your dog should see the crate as a wonderful place to be! They might start to choose to go into their crate at other times, all by themselves, maybe to have a nap or just to relax. Whenever they do naturally choose to go into their crate, particularly if they do just settle down inside of their own accord – because they feel it is a nice, safe place to be – don't make too much of a fuss so you don't disturb them, but gently and calmly tell them what a good dog they are so you capture this lovely moment and add to their good feeling!

Leaving your dog alone in their crate

This is the next big step! Your dog might feel absolutely fine being in their crate while you're there in the same room, occasionally dropping in treats and occasionally telling them how awesome they're being! But this might change if you were to leave the room, as this is when some dogs can start to feel worried.

The good thing is that if you've followed all the previous steps your dog will understand that being in their crate is great, even if you're not there! You now just need them to know it is still great even when you're not in the room, or even the house!



- Start by giving them their meal, long-lasting tasty chew or food-releasing toy, closing the crate door and then slowly moving towards the door of the room to see how they react. If they continue enjoying themselves, then you can pop out of the room briefly before returning and carrying on with your own affairs, occasionally throwing a treat into the crate or saying "good dog"!
- Gradually build up the length of time you remain outside the room, initially always making sure your dog has something enjoyable to occupy themselves with inside their crate. They will be learning that they don't have to rely on you being there to have a lovely time.

Using the crate in everyday life...

- It is important that the crate is never used as a punishment. A dog can't understand the reason for this and might start to feel unhappy about being in the crate, excluded from the fun they were having moments before!
- Adult dogs shouldn't be left alone for more than 4 hours. Even though a dog might really love their crate, they shouldn't spend too much time inside as they might become stiff and might also need the toilet!

Always make sure your dog is having a good time in their crate, whether enjoying their toys, chews or simply dozing and snoozing - the safer and more comfortable they feel inside, the happier they'll be spending time in their crate when you need them to!

Dogs Trust provide lifelong behavioural support for all our adopted dogs. If you need help for your Dogs Trust Dog, please email: reception@dogstrust.ie

For more information about Dogs Trust, to make a donation or help us in our campaigns please call 01 8791000, write to: Dogs Trust, Ashbourne Road, Finglas, Dublin 11 or visit www.dogstrust.ie



If you are interested in Dog School training classes, please contact the team via [www. DogsTrust.ie/DogSchool](http://www.DogsTrust.ie/DogSchool)

The advice contained in this handout is of a general nature and is no substitute for specific behavioural or veterinary advice.