



Tips and Games for Crate Training

General Tips

1. Make the crate a great place to be...
 - a. Feed all meals in the crate while habituating your dog to the crate.
 - b. Whenever you ask your dog to go into his crate to stay, give him a treat as soon as you close the door.
2. Never use the crate as punishment.
3. Never force your dog into the crate. While luring is not the most robust way to teach a dog, it is better to lure the dog into the crate with something fantastic (and ideally long lasting) than to chase him down and then stuff him protesting into the crate.
4. Experiment with different locations for the crate – your dog may be more comfortable if he can be near you when he is learning how to be content in this crate.
5. If your dog is unhappy in his crate, consider trying a different style of crates. An open wire crate will provide more visibility so he can keep tabs on you and the household. Some dogs may prefer the den-like nature of a solid sided crate.
6. If your pup did not come to you crate trained, you need to start at the beginning with training – and do this before you need to secure your dog in the crate for any period of time. If at all possible avoid putting a puppy who has not been crate trained in a crate and then leaving him alone. An Xpen with potty area may be an appropriate temporary alternative until you have done the crate training.

Games:

1. **My crate is magic!**
 - a. Randomly (but often) provide 'surprises' in the crate for your dog to find. Don't cue him that there is anything there – just let him find them on his own. Leave the crate door open.
 - Kongs filled with peanut butter (remember never to use sugar free fillings as these often have xylose which is toxic to dogs), soft cheese, canned dog food, tripe, baby food etc. Freeze the filled kong for a longer lasting treat.
 - Bully sticks
 - Raw meaty bones
 - Treats
 - New toys
2. **Cookie Toss**
 - a. Open the crate door and secure it in the open position with a bungee or tieback.
 - b. If using a wire crate it is helpful to wrap a towel or foam strip over the wire at the bottom of the doorway to prevent the dog from catching a toe or toenail

while running in and out of the crate (you will be working this up to get speed and drive).

- c. Prepare two kinds of treats – one of them should be something your dog is crazy for and the other not quite as special. Set up close to the open door of the crate. Toss one of the best treats into the back of the crate. If your dog needs a release cue to go after the treat, use it. Just as your dog is finishing his treat, call him back to you and toss the other ‘not so special’ treat away from the crate. Repeat 5 times – by this time, your dog should be eagerly running into the crate to get his treat.
- d. Once your dog is happy to run into the crate to get a treat, you can add a cue such as ‘kennel up’, ‘go to bed’ or ‘crate’. Say the cue and immediately toss the cookie into the crate. Call your dog out as before. Repeat 5-10 times.
- e. Give the ‘kennel up’ cue and wait a little bit to see if your dog will head into the crate on his own. If he does toss a handful of treats (jackpot) into the back of the crate. If he does not head in on his own, encourage him by tossing one treat into the crate. Repeat this step 10 times and then give your dog a break.
- f. When you return to this game, start where you left off for a couple of repetitions. If your dog has difficulty, you might need to go back to (d) for a couple of reps. After this warm up, work on building distance. Set yourself up a couple of feet from the crate and go back to step (e) and work through 5-10 repetitions. Once he is moving quickly on cue into the crate, move a bit further back to increase the distance and repeat. Keep increasing the distance step by step until you can send your dog into the crate from across the room. Once you have reached a distance where you can no longer accurately toss a treat into the crate, you can run with your dog to the crate (let him start moving to the crate then run after him). As you approach the crate, toss the treat into the back of the crate.

3. My crate has a door!

- a. Once you have worked through the cookie toss game and your dog enthusiastically runs into his crate on cue, you can start closing the door of the crate. The aim of this game is for your dog to be successful in NOT fussing with the door closed. It is YOUR job to make sure you open the door BEFORE he fusses. That may mean starting with a millisecond of closure and building from there. You do not want to ‘test’ his limits but rather to slowly grow his tolerance for being in the crate with the door closed. If your dog fusses before you open the door – whack **yourself** over the head with a rolled up newspaper, and wait for your pup to stop fussing for one second and open the door while he is quiet. Be sure to be quicker in opening the door the next time. Avoid opening the door during a period of fussing as your dog may learn that fussing makes the door open. Do not let your dog get into a state – if he is fussing continuously and you cannot get one second of quiet, toss in a couple of treats and open the door while he is eating them. Go back and start again from the beginning.
- b. Go back to 2(e) and once your dog is in the crate close the door (don't latch it – just hold it closed with your hand) then immediately open it and release your dog. Repeat 5 times.
- c. Increase the time the door is closed very slightly and repeat the exercise.
- d. Gradually increase the time the door is closed.

- e. Once your dog is happy in the crate with the door closed for 10-15 seconds, you can start stepping away from the crate and then immediately return.
- f. Keep slowly increasing the time the door is closed and you are away from the crate.
- g. You will likely need to work this exercise over a number of days or even weeks.

4. Shaping the crate

- a. If you are familiar with shaping behaviours, this is an alternative to the cookie toss. This works best for puppies that are clicker savvy, have some experience with shaping behaviours, and have no negative history with the crate.
- b. Have great treats and your clicker handy. Secure the crate door open. If possible, set the crate up in a corner and position yourself at the front of the exposed side of the crate (so that your dog's options for interacting with the crate are limited to the front of the crate). Call your dog over and wait for him to offer any behaviour relative to the crate. Make sure you are looking at the crate – specifically at the open door area. The shaping staircase might look something like this:
 - i. A look at the crate door area
 - ii. Nose enters the crate
 - iii. Head into the crate
 - iv. One foot in the crate
 - v. Two feet in the crate
 - vi. Three feet in the crate
 - vii. Four feet in the crate
 - viii. Sit in the crate
 - ix. Lie down in the crate
 - x. Stay quiet for a moment in the crate while the door is closed.
- c. Remember to click and treat each time and use great treats. Tossing the treat away from the crate will set your dog up to offer the next behaviour.
- d. Once the dog is heading into the crate, try to deliver the treat towards the back of the crate. This is easy with a wire crate but you can also drop treats through openings in the sidewalls or back of solid crates.

5. Open door – Closed door

- a. This game teaches your dog not to bolt out of the crate the moment the door is opened.
- b. Your dog will need a trained release cue before you work on this game.
- c. Have the dog sitting in the crate with the door closed.
- d. Reach for door. If your dog moves from position, remove your hand and wait until he returns to a sit. If he stays still, open the door. If he moves to exit the crate before you give your release cue, gently close the door in his face and wait until he sits, then open it again. You may have to repeat a number of times until he realizes that if he moves prior to his release cue, the door will close again.
- e. Keep shaping your dog to patiently wait for his release cue while you leave the door open, move away from the crate, leave the crate area for increasing periods of time, reach in and attach a lead, introduce distractions such as dropped treats, tossed treats, tossed toys etc. When giving reinforcers for staying in position, try to do this through an opening at the rear of the crate. This positioning helps keep your dog from moving forward in the crate.