
Golden Retriever Rescue of Wisconsin, Inc.

Crate Training – More Than You Ever Wanted to Know!**GRRoW Hotline: 888-655-4753**

CRATE TRAINING is NOT cruel and unusual punishment! Quite the contrary. It keeps the puppy safe from chewing things like electrical cords and your new shoes when you cannot be around to supervise. It can be considered the same as a playpen for a baby.



It is also an invaluable tool in housetraining a puppy. Puppies learn from their mother that they shouldn't soil their sleeping area. When the dam whelps the pups in the wild she sets up a den and keeps it clean until the pups are old enough to go outside on their own. She teaches them it is not okay to potty in the place where they sleep. The puppies will crawl away from their sleeping area to the potty area, and eliminate there. They are already innately trained not to soil the area where they sleep.

Domestic dogs will also naturally den. You will often see a dog sleeping under a table or desk or next to a piece of furniture if no other area is provided for them to den. It is not cruel to develop this habit from the time you bring the puppy home. In fact, it is cruel not to give the pup or dog a safe area they can call his own.

A FEW BASICS:

- A crate is not to be used as punishment.
- If your eyes are not on the puppy at every moment, or you are not making use of the "umbilical cord" the puppy should be in a crate; both for his own safety and to prevent unwanted behaviors that you cannot catch, correct or prevent.
- Proper crate sizing involves checking that the crate allows the pup room to enter standing up, not hitting his withers; turn around and lay down. Any less is too small, any more is too large.
- It doesn't hurt to have crates in every size for each stage of the dog's growth! However, if you do purchase a large crate that will fit your puppy when he is full grown, then you need to partition it off so that he doesn't have too much room. If the crate is too large, he may be encouraged to use it to eliminate in, as he still has room to get away from the 'mess' and be comfortable.

Decide on The Rules. If your puppy whines when you first put him in his crate it is probably because he would rather be snuggled up close to you the way he was with his littermates. If you allow the puppy access to your lap, bed, couch or chair when you first get the puppy then it will be harder to eliminate these behaviors as the puppy grows up. Think of what the adult size of your dog will be and decide if you have room in your lap, bed, etc. for the adult dog. You must decide before you bring the puppy home what the "rules" will be and then stick to them.

Talk to Your Breeder. If you're lucky, the breeder has begun to crate train the puppies while they are still in the whelping box by providing a crate for them to sleep in. If this is the case, then all you have to do is to allow the puppy to get used to it's new crate, it's smells and your home and your job will go much faster. If possible, get a familiar piece of bedding from the breeder, one which has the smells of the litter on it. Place this in the crate along with the other pads or towels. This will help the puppy feel at home. You can return this to the breeder once the puppy is used to his new home.

Positive Associations. Crate training should be done with all positive and no negative associations. When you first bring the puppy home from the breeder, have the crate ready and comfortable for the puppy. Put a towel or a washable pad in the crate. Use a small, soft yummy treat and allow the puppy to sniff it and then lure the puppy into the crate with the treat. When the puppy goes into the crate to get the treat and explore the new area, just leave the door open and let him come out as he wishes. Don't force the pup into the crate and don't make him stay in there the first several times. Repeat putting a treat in the crate, allowing the puppy to go in on his own for the treat. Do this several times and praise the puppy gently while it's in the crate and associate a word or phrase (command) for going in the crate. Our command is "go kennel". Use the command AS you put the treat into the crate and the puppy is following it in. Do this about five times and then quit for a while. Repeat this procedure several times the first day.

Closing/Opening The Crate Door. When the puppy is going in after the treat comfortably, AND when the puppy has JUST finished playing, piddling and is tired, lure the puppy into the crate with the treat as you have before only this time close the door. You can also put a new toy in the crate at this time. Something the puppy hasn't seen before and something that is interesting and will keep his attention for a few minutes. After closing the door, sit on the floor in front of the crate and talk to the puppy if necessary. If the puppy cries or whines, you can put fingers through the grate in the door to reassure the puppy that you are still there. Usually, he will only whine for a short while and may even fall asleep if he is tired.

When the whining subsides and the puppy calms down, open the crate door. If the puppy happens to fall asleep during this time, great! Let him sleep in the crate until he wakes up, and then take him right outside to go potty. Don't use a lot of praise and fanfare when opening the crate door and ignore the puppy for a few minutes after he is out so that he doesn't get the impression that getting out is much more fun than being in the crate. Do not let the puppy out of the crate until he is quiet for at least 30 seconds and has calmed down, if he has been whining. You might try and distract him with another toy to give him a chance to be quiet so you can let him out while he is quiet but do NOT let him out, especially the first time, until he IS quiet. Don't yell or correct in any negative way. Just make up your mind that you will calmly wait the puppy out no matter what.

The First Few Nights. If you have gotten your puppy during the day and had time to do the above steps, great! The puppy will already be familiar with going in the crate after a treat. If not, play with the puppy till he's tired, make sure he has pottied outside and place the comfortable crate on a chair or table right next to your bed where you can reach it while still lying down. Remove any collar that might be unsafe, place or lure the tired puppy into the crate, with a safe toy, go to bed and turn out the lights as usual. If the puppy whines, you may place your fingers in the grate of the crate and talk softly to the puppy until he quiets. You may lose a little sleep that night and possibly the next but do NOT open the door for the puppy for at least four hours. (Remember the puppy has successfully pottied just before this!) Do not get angry with the puppy or yell at him but do not give in and let him out either. If the crate is comfortable and warm enough, the lights are out and you are right there to talk softly to him and let him lick your fingers, then usually he will fall asleep within an hour, less if he is tired.

At eight weeks of age you cannot expect the puppy to go more than four hours without pottying. So, as soon as the puppy whines after waking up, have your sweats & shoes ready to take the puppy outside. Dress yourself quickly before you open the crate, CARRY the puppy to the potty area immediately, praise softly and gently for a job well done, bring him back in and without getting into a play session with him, return the puppy to his crate, turn the lights out and go back to sleep. If the puppy fusses for a while, talk softly and put your fingers in the grate of the crate. Two or three nights of this at the most and your puppy will be used to the routine. If you happen to sleep through the puppy whining and he is forced to potty in his crate because he can't hold it, don't blame or scold the puppy. It is your responsibility to get the puppy out BEFORE he has had a chance soil his den. Clean it up using a vinegar/water or enzyme solution, put clean towels or pads in the crate and return to your routine. Set an alarm clock if you have to. Later on, after the puppy is used to it's routine and after he no longer needs to go out every four hours, you can put the crate on the floor of your bedroom or somewhere else in the house.

Leaving The House. At some point you have to go to work or go out somewhere and can't take the puppy. He's made it through his first day and night at his new home. He is familiar with his crate and it does not have any unpleasant associations linked to it. Make sure the pup has been exercised and has pottied. It is helpful if he has played a bit and is tired. Turn a radio or television on to serve as "white noise". Take off his collar and remove any unsafe toys that may be in the crate, lure him into the crate with a treat and use your command word, or physically place the puppy into the crate gently. Close the door and leave the house without further adieu. No talking to him etc.

He may whine a little. You might have to explain to your neighbors that you are crate training your new puppy to keep him safe from chewing things like electrical cords and your new shoes while you are away and so he will develop good potty habits. Explain that he may whine for a little while after you leave. Hopefully they will understand. Don't stay away too long. An hour or two, is optimal. If you have to go to work and have no other choice, then arrange to come home at lunch to feed, exercise and potty the puppy during your break or have someone else come in and do this for you. A puppy cannot be expected to go longer than four hours without a potty break and it is very hard to retrain a puppy that is allowed to get used to soiling his crate.

A Place of Respite. After the puppy has grown a bit and is used to being put into his crate when you leave and at night when you sleep, you will see something interesting happen. When the puppy is tired and wants some time alone, possibly away from children or other pets, he will go to his crate and curl up and go to sleep. Leave the doors of crates open, so that he can go there of his own accord.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS:

Flying. Suppose you have to fly your dog on a plane. They must be crated for this. Flying is stressful enough for the dog who is already crate trained but add the stress of never having been in a crate to a dog who has to fly for the first time. Can you see a reason for the dog to be used to a crate?

Boarding/Vacations. What if you have to go out of town and need to leave the dog in a boarding kennel? A crate trained dog will understand and adapt to this situation easily. Usually, you can bring the dog's own crate with you to the kennel and allow the dog some comfort in having his own bed to sleep in. If you are lucky enough to be able to take your dog, you'll be able to tell a hotel/motel innkeeper that your dog will be in it's crate when you are not in the room!

Car Safety. Keeping dog safe in the car is another reason to crate train. Nobody likes to think of what would happen if they were in a car accident. Car doors can fly open and the dog, if uncrated, stands a good chance of leaping out into traffic and getting hit by a car or running off because they are scared. If you have your dog crated in the car when in an accident the dog may get banged around but the crate will most likely protect the dog from being hit, may help contain the dog in the car itself, and will keep him from being lost if the car doors fly open even if the crate is expelled from the car. If you are hurt in the accident the emergency services people are more likely keep your dog safe and contained if the dog is in a crate and they can easily transport the dog to a safe area.

Note: While this article is geared towards teaching puppies, it is applicable to all ages of untrained dogs.

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