

*If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Behavior and Training Department by phone: 410-235-8826 Ext. 151 or by email: trainer@mdspca.org.

Confinement and Crate Training

Owners are often unsure whether they need to crate train their puppies or newly-adopted dogs or whether to simply confine them in a dog-proofed area during the early weeks or months following adoption. Crate training helps with the following:

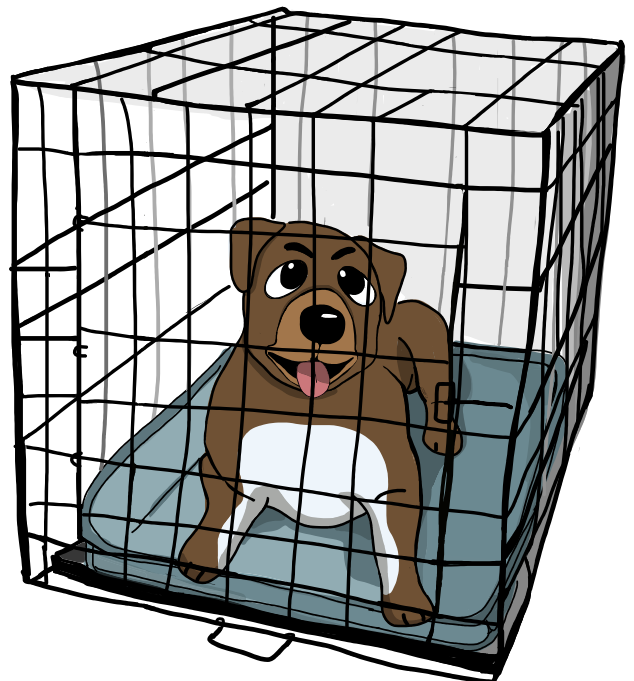
1. **Housetraining:** prompts the dog to hold bladder and bowels when unsupervised
2. **Chew-training:** prevents the dog from chewing furniture, walls and anything else except the chew toys he is crated with so good habits automatically form
3. **Settling down:** patterns dog to be inactive when alone
4. **Preparation for possible close confinement:** dogs that are used to crates are less likely to be stressed when caged during a hospital stay or travel

Chewing management can be accomplished with a dog-proofed room or ex-pen and these are good alternatives. But if the dog is shaky on housetraining, you're better off crate training him as the close confinement will inhibit urination and defecation. During housetraining, the crate should be only large enough for the dog to stand up, turn around and lie down comfortably.

HOW TO GET HIM USED TO HIS CRATE

If you want your dog to love hanging out in his crate, early association is huge. Make the crate comfy with a nice pad or blanket, situate it in a high traffic area like the kitchen and, whenever the dog isn't looking, drop a couple of treats at the back for him to discover. Feed him meals in there with the door open. Tie an attractive stuffed chew-toy inside so that he must lie in the crate in order to chew on it.

After a few days, teach the dog to enter and exit on cue. Say "into bed", throw in a treat, praise as the dog goes in and then let him exit. Repeat this a few times and then change the order of events: say "into bed" and wait for him to go in before dropping in the treat. If the dog doesn't enter, simply wait. Do not ask him a second time and do not crack and throw the treat in. Just wait. If he doesn't go in, end the training session without comment. Try another session in a little while, still withholding the reward until the dog goes in on his own.



When he does (and they all do eventually, so hang in there), give him a double or triple reward, do a few more reps and then end the session. Always leave the dog wanting more.

When the dog is going in and out on cue, try the first lock-in. Same game, only now close the door and feed him treats through the grate for a minute before letting him out. Do this several times. Then walk around the crate and the room while he is inside, pitching treats at him occasionally and then, after a couple of minutes, letting him out.

The next step is to add some duration. Crate him while you watch a movie. Stuff a couple of chew toys, set the crate up next to your chair and cue the dog into the crate. When he goes in, give him the chew toys, close the door and start the movie. Leave a few times to get a snack or a drink, but always come back quickly. The first experience being locked in the crate for this length of time must be overwhelmingly easy and good. Ignore any noise or agitation. At the end of the movie, if the dog is quiet and settled, simply open the door and let him out without any fanfare. Do not open the door if the dog is misbehaving, as this can reinforce the misbehavior.

Now spend a few days crating the dog with the door closed when you're at home, going about your usual business. Provide interesting crate puzzles (i.e. chew toys) each time.

The first time you leave the house, do so for just a minute. Then do 5 minutes, 15, 30, an hour, 2, 3 and 4 hours. Throw in some short absences (a minute or so) to mix it up. Depart and arrive without any fanfare. Tire the dog out with vigorous exercise and training before the longest absences. You must gradually condition the dog to being in the crate before using it regularly. And don't forget the chew toys.

HELP! HE SOILS THE CRATE

If your dog is soiling his crate, first try removing the pad or blanket for a week—the porous material may be triggering elimination. Be sure, also, that you are not stretching the dog too long between bathroom trips and forcing him to eliminate in his crate. Keep both the dog and the crate scrupulously clean. You can often nurse back the clean instinct. It would also be prudent to have him checked by his veterinarian for a bladder infection or sleep incontinence.