

-Why Use A Dog Crate?

Adapted from article originally authored by Chris Bach.

Now that you've brought your new puppy home, did you know that your puppy learns something in every moment that he or she is awake? Every move your puppy makes teaches your puppy something about living in your home. When your puppy does something (a behavior) that "works," your puppy has learned important facts about how to control the world around him. Behaviors that "work" are those that bring gratification—in other words, these behaviors please the puppy. For example, when your puppy barks out of excitement and you give the puppy attention, the puppy learns that barking works to gain attention. You can probably imagine that this behavior might not be one that you want to be continued! On the other hand, when your puppy barks and you immediately take the puppy outside, the puppy learns that a bark signals YOU to perform a behavior, in this case letting the puppy outdoors. This behavior is probably one that you want the puppy to continue.

Because your puppy is learning by interacting with you, your family and the environment in and around your home, controlling the puppy's interactions during the first month or two in your home is important. Controlling interactions means that your puppy is either confined or is supervised with 100% of your attention focused on your puppy. This way, you will be able to be sure that your puppy is NOT rewarded (through attention, petting, or food rewards) for behaviors that you do not wish to continue. At the same time, you will be able to be sure that your puppy IS rewarded for behaviors that you do wish to have the puppy continue.

Using a dog crate is a good way to be sure that that your puppy is safe and in a controlled environment when you cannot give the puppy 100% of your attention.

For example, when your puppy is in a crate, your puppy can chew only on what you provide for the puppy to chew. The puppy then develops the habit of chewing on the right type of things. A puppy freely roaming a room when you are not watching closely may discover how fun it is to chew on the woodwork, walls or an electrical cord. This is not only dangerous, but teaches the puppy that he may chew on anything he chooses when you are not watching.

The crate has other benefits for your puppy. Sometimes you will NEED to confine your puppy so that you can do chores or simply relax. Focusing your attention on a mischievous puppy is a lot of work! The crate provides a moveable "den" for your puppy. Simply move the crate from room to room as you do chores. Sometimes, when a puppy is ill, a veterinarian may recommend restricted activity. When your puppy is familiar with a crate, you will be able to easily restrict activity.

Finally, when you travel, a crate is essential. The dog crate is your puppy's "seatbelt" in case of a sudden stop or accident. A ten-pound puppy loose during a collision may hit a windshield with the same force as if dropped from a three-story building. So, a crate is absolutely needed when your puppy rides in your car....even if you are just going for a short jaunt.

A dog crate is NOT a substitute for loving human interaction and no puppy should be left in a crate for hours on end. It is, however, a great way to keep your puppy safe when you cannot pay 100% attention or need to transport your puppy, and to assure that your puppy has positive learning experiences that will help you mold your puppy into a canine companion who will bring you years of joy.

Controlling the environment is the KEY to molding your loveable, silly, and mischievous puppy into a well-behaved adult. The dog crate offers by far the safest and smartest method for environmental control.