

Training Plan: Feel Comfortable in a Crate



Goal: dog feels comfortable being in a crate with the door closed

A dog who is uncomfortable in a crate should not be left in one. The dog will be frightened, and may injure him/herself trying to escape. Note that some larger dogs can escape from crates if they are motivated enough. Wire crates are especially prone to escape.

Work with an appropriately sized crate. The dog should be able to stand up and turn around when inside. Make the crate comfy with a nice crate pad or blanket. For fearful dogs, place it in an out-of-the-way place where there won't be a lot of motion and noise.

Once a dog is crate trained (i.e., very comfortable being in a crate), maximum confinement time is 6 hours.

One of the easiest ways to help a dog feel more comfortable in a crate is to feed him/her in the crate. If the dog won't enter the crate for the meal, place the food outside the crate, near the crate door. You can also try the bullet points in step 1, below, when starting to feed a dog in a crate. You use meals in this way while you are working through the crate training plan, below.

Training plan

Do each step until the dog is completely comfortable and does not startle or run out of crate. Dogs may fly through some of the steps with no repetition, while needing lots of repetition on others. Patience is the key to success.

Step 1: Leave the crate open. While the dog isn't looking, put high value treats (e.g. chicken, cheese) into the crate throughout the day. Allow the dog to enter and exit the crate as he/she wants. If dog will not enter crate, do any of the following:

- Start placing treats outside the crate door, then on lip of door frame, then inside
- Remove crate door
- Remove door and top half of crate

Once the dog is confidently entering and exiting, replace the top half and door, and repeat step one.

Step 2: Put several treats into the crate. While the dog is eating, put more treats into the crate through openings at the back of the crate. Touch the crate door. If this startles a dog, then drop to merely moving toward the crate, or even to moving your arms slightly in place without moving toward the crate. Then work in small steps up to touching the crate door.

Step 3: Same as step 2 but close door halfway and immediately re-open.

Step 4: Same as step 2 but close door all the way, without latching it, and immediately re-open.

Step 5: Same as step 2 but close door all the way, latch it closed, and immediately re-open.

Step 5: Smear peanut butter or put other time-consuming treat (stuffed Kong, etc) inside crate. While dog is inside, close door and latch it, toss in additional treats at the back of the crate, and immediately re-open it.

Step 6: Step 5 but gradually increase the time door is closed. Toss in additional treats while door is closed. Open door, but do not feed dog if he/she exits. Ways to gradually increase time while the dog is in the crate:

- Walk around the room
- Read a book
- Watch a movie

If you get stuck or have any trouble, please contact the NMDR Behavior department at (719) 683-2905.