



Dog Adopter Tips: Housebreaking and Crate-Training

Housebreaking your dog may sound daunting, but it just takes time, patience, and some know-how. Before starting, read our Welcome Home tips!

In general, keep in mind that dogs respond far better to positive reinforcement than to reprimanding. The more you put your dog in a position to succeed and praise them every time they do something right, the faster they will learn. Reprimanding, on the other hand, doesn't teach your dog what you want them to do. It only tells them they've done something wrong.

If you want to housebreak your dog without crate-training, you'll need to be home most of the time and be willing to take them out in the middle of the night. Take your dog outside for potty breaks every few hours, rewarding them every time they go. If you catch them having an accident in the house, interrupt them with a quick correction ("Oops!") and take them outside, then praise them when they go where they should. If you notice an accident later, it's too late to correct them, so just clean up the mess and move on! If you aren't having luck after a few weeks of this method, it's time to try the crate. Crate-training helps to housebreak a dog because when the crate is sized properly, they won't have enough room to pee or poop without getting it on themselves, so they hold it until you take them out.

Step 1 - Find the right size crate and make it a comfortable place

A properly sized crate is one where the dog can lie down, stand up fully, and turn around easily.

Some people worry that it is unfair to lock up a dog in a cage all day. But the dog won't see it that way if you make it a happy, comfortable place! Once your dog is crate-trained, they may even enjoy napping in their crate or seek it out for a quiet moment when you have guests. Set it up with comfy blankets and an old t-shirt that smells like you, some toys that will be safe for them to have unsupervised (rope toys, Nylabones, and Kongs are usually durable), and a food bowl. Don't offer water because your dog may drink excessively and then won't be able to hold their bladder long enough.

Never use the crate in punishment – if you force your dog in when you are angry, they will associate it with bad things, resist it, and attempt to escape it!

Step 2 - Choose a location for the crate

Place the crate in an area where it can stay long-term and where the dog will be comfortable. The living room, bedroom, or office make natural choices. Make sure it won't get too much sun, heat, or air-conditioning from a fan or vent throughout the day. If you have other pets that will be loose during the day, choose a room where you can close the door so the other animals don't excite your crated dog.

Step 3 - Teach your dog that the crate is where food appears

If your dog is nervous to go near the crate, make it more appealing for them by tossing treats nearby and praising them when they approach it. Then, throw treats inside the crate so they have to walk in to get them. Feed all their meals inside the crate, too. Spend a lot of time during your first evening together working on this so they feel better about being in it overnight. Teach them a word like "crate," "bed," or "house" so you can eventually ask them to go in on their own before getting the treat.

Step 4 - Schedule crating times

Sticking to a schedule and routine is good for many reasons, but it's essential for housebreaking. If you feed your dog at the same time every day, they'll need to go potty at the same time, too. And, if they can anticipate how much longer it will be until they'll get walked, they'll have an easier time holding it.

Step 5 - Exercise and cuddle before crating

Your dog should be tired from a brisk walk and enjoy some social time with you before being crated. Spend at least one hour with them before having them go back into their crate.

Step 6 - Quiet time

When you lock your dog in the crate, give them their meal, and turn away. They may start barking or whining right away, or maybe they'll start up a few minutes later. Ignore them completely! If you reassure, correct, or even yell at them, they will latch on to that attention and take it as encouragement to keep barking. In a dog's mind, even negative attention is better than no attention, so you must have a strong will and be consistent. Warn your neighbors that the first few nights may be difficult, but the dog should settle down faster each night. By the end of the first week, they should be used to the crate and quiet all night.

Step 7 - Letting them out

When you wake up in the morning, get yourself fully dressed and ready to go outside before letting your dog out of the crate. If you let your dog loose, then spend a minute tying your shoes, your dog will probably have an accident right on the floor in front of you – remember, they've been holding it! Open the crate door without any fanfare – avoid lavishing them with praise and cuddles just yet. Stay calm and try to keep your dog calm, too. Leash them up

immediately and make a beeline for the door. Once you are outside, you can get excited and give them some more attention, but focus on walking to a spot you want them to go. Bring treats with you and teach them prompts like "Go potty" or "Do your business" (it's ideal to have different words for pee and poop). Once she goes, praise her ("Good potty!") and give her a treat.

As always, call PAWS if you have problems!

If your dog is so scared of the crate they run from it even after a few hours of treat training, or if their barking gets worse each night, then call PAWS for help before it gets out of hand!