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Crate Training

Why crate train your dog?

Crates are handy tools for a variety of purposes. They serve as a den-like safe space for your dog to relax and as a training aid. Crates are helpful for separating pets during meal time and are a helpful management tool for a variety of unwanted behaviors. The key to successful crate training is to make sure that your dog always has positive experiences in the crate.

How to Teach Your Dog to Love their Crate:

Step 1. Show your dog a treat and toss it into the crate. If your dog enters immediately for the treat, click your clicker and offer them a few more treats while they're standing inside the crate. Repeat this several times, being sure to reset your dog by tossing one treat outside the crate. Resetting your dog allows them to practice willingly entering the crate, not just staying inside.

Troubleshooting: If your dog does not enter the crate immediately, try setting up a trail of treats leading into the crate. Click and give your puppy a jackpot (6 or more treats) once they are all the way inside.

Step 2. Act it out! Motion your hand as if you were tossing a treat, as you did in Step 1, but don't actually toss anything. When your dog enters, looking for the treat, click your clicker and give them a few treats. Repeat this step several times so that they practice going in with the hand motion alone.

Troubleshooting: Some dogs are a bit too clever for this step. Try this up to 3 times and only go back to the real toss if all attempts are unsuccessful. If your dog enters at all for a fake toss, be sure to give them a treat jackpot once they're inside the crate.

Step 3. Fade the motion. Repeat step 2 several more times, gradually making your hand motion less obvious. You may even go from a full toss to a slight point towards the crate.

Step 4. Add a verbal cue. Once your dog is reliably entering the crate when you point at it, introduce a verbal cue just before you point. For example, say the word "crate", pause for one second, then point to the crate. Reward them for entering, as usual, and repeat this step several times.

Step 5. Fade the hand signal. Pause for a few seconds longer between your verbal cue, “crate”, and your hand signal (pointing). If your dog enters the crate prior to your hand motion, reward them with a jackpot! Continue to practice using only the verbal cue. If your puppy waits for the point, continue practicing with pauses between the cues. Eventually, your puppy will respond to the verbal cue alone.

Troubleshooting: If your puppy is waiting for the visual cue before responding then you are either blending the verbal and visual, or otherwise sending your puppy mixed signals. Silently count to one-mississippi or more between both cues to ensure that you are separating the cues. Blending the two means your puppy will rely on one more than the other or both before responding.

Step 6. Shut the door. Now that your dog is entering the crate on cue, start shutting the door and treating them through the closed door. Open the door as soon as they’re done eating.

Step 7. Increase duration. Gradually increase the amount of time that the door stays shut. Continue to give treats periodically through the closed door.

Training Tip: At this phase, you may give your dog a longer lasting treat to enjoy in their crate, such as a kong stuffed with peanut butter, or a bully chew. You can also start feeding your dog their meal inside the crate.

Step 8. Increase distance. Once your dog is inside the crate with a closed door, take a few steps away. Click your clicker and return to toss a treat into the crate. Gradually increase the distance you travel away from the crate until you can leave your dog’s sight while they remain calm.

Troubleshooting: If at any point during the training process, your dog begins to fuss inside the crate, or refuses to enter, it means that they are having a negative experience in the crate. Go back to an earlier step in the plan and gradually work them back up to longer stays in the crate.

Training tip: We recommend keeping your dog’s crate in an area of your home where you spend a lot of time, such as your living room. Line the crate with soft bedding, so long as your dog is housetrained, to encourage your dog to stay in the crate for long periods. Covering the top of the crate with a sheet or blanket also helps make it a cozy space to relax.

For multi-dog households: Be sure that each dog has their own crate. If your dog becomes possessive of their crate, prevent the other dogs from accessing it by keeping the door shut when not in use. If your dog does not guard their crate, the door can remain open so that the crate is available as a resting place, or a way to take a break from the other dogs.