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Crate Training

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As a dog training consultant for many years I have gotten the frantic call from many a new dog or puppy owner – “Help! My rescue doggie is destroying the house!” or “Help! My puppy is relieving everywhere and destroying the house!” So, my first question is “are you crate training?” Contrary to some people’s opinion, a crate or kennel is not “doggie jail”. Many problems simply vanish when a kennel is properly used.

Think of it this way, a crate is like a den, a lair, a safe-haven, a place to rest in relative comfort away from noise & activity. Dogs are natural den creatures. All the puppies we have raised, sleep in a kennel during the night, and are crated for a time during the day when we can’t keep an eye on them. Similar to the whelping box, most dogs will seek out a location in a corner, under a table, or any protected area to be a den. Even our adult dog will nudge the door of their crate open and lay down to have a nap during the day.

As the leader of the pack it is your responsibility to provide for the needs of your pet, and crate training can be a vital tool. Whether made of metal, fabric or plastic, a crate needs to be large enough for the animal to stand up, turn around, and lay down. Avoid one too large or you may end up with the dog sleeping at one end and relieving in the other. Select a size that can accommodate a full grown dog and use a partition to limit the space with your puppy.

A crate is the safest place to transport your dog in the car. Leaving him loose, or on your lap, or (horrors!) hanging his head out the window, is just plain dangerous. Consider the repercussions of having your car’s airbag deploy (actually explode), even if you are involved in a minor fender-bender. Use a seat belt restraint for the back as an alternative. Small or young dogs can be clipped to a short leash in the foot space behind the copilot’s seat for added safety. Our pup curls up comfortably with her head on the hump and the A/C vent blowing gently on her face.

A crate should never be used as a punishment. Don’t force him. Toss a toy or treat inside, close the door then open it again. Build up the time the door is closed during the day. At night we close the crate door, say good night and expect the pup to eventually settle down. Your puppy might fuss at first, but if you don’t react and just remain silent, he will finally relax and sleep. Interestingly, a new pup makes a different noise when he needs to relieve while confined since animals prefer not to soil their beds. So be ready to scoop him up (he might relieve along the way), take him to the spot to go, then it is back to bed without much “fanfare.” A young pup could be kenneled in your bedroom for just that eventuality. Other tips include limiting evening water and one last relieving opportunity before lights out.