

Crate train Rex in 5 steps

A science-based and dog-friendly method for a crate-trained dog

By OhMyDog!

INTRODUCTION

WHAT ARE WE HOPING TO ACHIEVE?

A dog that happily goes to his crate the instant you ask him to 'go to bed'.

A dog that happily settles in his crate for up to 4 hours on end, with minimum distress and boredom.

WHY IS IT AN ESSENTIAL LIFE SKILL?

WHY?	REALLY, WHY?
Safe when unsupervised	Puppy crate = baby play pen. A place to stay out of trouble when unsupervised.
Potty training	Crate = human nappy. A key tool in potty training (see potty training hand-out).
Guests	Crate = own quarters. A place to settle with one's Kong when Aunt Edna (allergic to dogs), and little Tommie (petrified of dogs) come visit. Or even a safe haven for your shy dog at your 6-year-old's birthday party.
Vet stay	Crate = familiar enclosed space when staying at the vet's overnight. We don't want to add crate panic to the post-operative pain and confusion.
Transport	Crate = familiar enclosed space during transport. When flying by plane, or in the car.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Crate:

1. *Solid and dog-safe material;*
2. *Large enough for your adult-sized dog to turn around in without having to bend;*
3. *Opaque sides (you can drape your open wired crate); and*
4. *Comfortable and safe (i.e. designed for dog use) basket/bedding/blanket inside.*

Treats: DentaStix, Kong, other slow dispensing food toys, pig's ears, etc.

WHERE TO PUT THE CRATE

Pick a quiet spot (so, little foot traffic and general household shenanigans; and so not close to your front window).

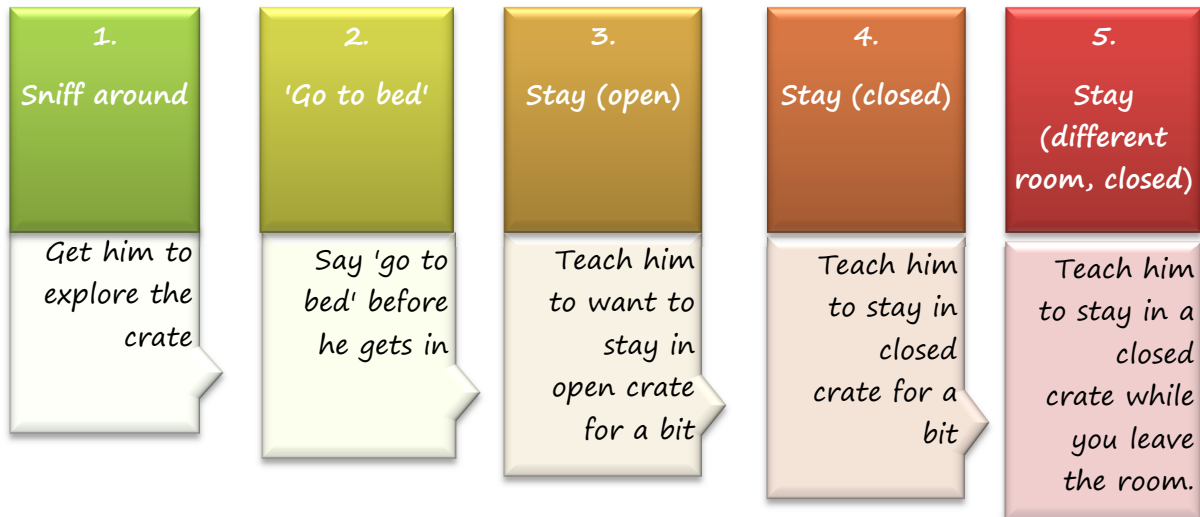
Also, pick a spot that offers a comfortable temperature (avoid cold drafts).

OUR METHOD

GRADUAL STEPS AND NO INTIMIDATION DOES IT

Do not go to the next step until the dog can reliably perform at the current stage (i.e. until 8:10 attempts are successful at the current stage).

At the first sign of protest/unease, go back a stage. You're saving yourself time by building solid foundation, rather than ploughing through on quick sand.



STEP 1: SNIFF AROUND

Goal: You will teach the dog to want to explore the crate.

Methods:

1. Throw interesting toys and treats there, and point to them, encouraging him to go in. When he does, praise him, and then throw more treats in.

OMD! tips:

1. Don't crowd the crate's exit/entrance. Leave a good 50 cm between you and the crate so it's clear he can leave whenever he wants.
2. Don't tower/bend over the dog when he comes out.
3. Don't stare at him when he comes out. Instead, look/stand slightly sideways to him.
4. When praising the dog, don't pet/tap him on the head. You'll just distract him + that's not what he's working for right now.
5. When praising the dog, make it cheerful, but not overwhelmingly enthusiastic. Don't say he's just off/has avoided his punishment.

2. Leave interesting toys and treats there for him to find out by himself, without your prompting.

OMD! tip: Do not yet use a command. We're just getting him to reliably go into his crate right now. We'll add a word to it when we are sure we can capture the behaviour.

3. When Rex is about to drop off to sleep, gently pick him up and place him in his crate. Try to pick up Rex if you find him fast asleep, and place him in his crate.

OMD! tip: If he resists your mid-nap body snatching, cease this practice. There is no point in creating an aversion to the crate.

4. Once in a while, smear peanut butter or cheese spread on a bit of one of the crate's walls, then close the crate door with the dog outside of it. This makes the crate all the more interesting.
5. Feed him one of his meals in the crate. Don't make a fuss. Just put his dish there and let him eat from there.

STEP II: SAY 'GO TO BED'

Goal: Once you can just point, the dog reliably goes in

Method:

1. Say 'go to bed'
2. Point to the crate
3. Dog goes in
4. Praise him
5. Give him a treat
6. Say 'out'
7. Lure him out with a treat

OMD! tip: Whisper the command in a chirpy voice. Dogs comply with requests A LOT quicker than with orders/intimidation (which will sooner get them to shut down).

STEP III: STAY A BIT (OPEN DOOR)

Goal: You'll get the dog to want to *stay* in the crate, but keep the door open throughout.

Method: Start with just 20 seconds, then *gradually* increase the time you'd like him to stay to 5 minutes.

Do not increase the duration until he reliably stays at the current duration 8:10 times.

1. Place a huge chew/lick object inside the cage, which you have preliminarily smeared with cheese spread, butter, whatever dog-safe paste. It needs to be so huge that the dog needs to stay inside the crate to consume it.
2. Say 'go to bed'
3. Point to the crate
4. (Dog goes in)
5. Praise him very calmly, so he stays put
6. If he doesn't chew the bone, giving him lots of treats (or a treat that takes longer to eat, like a DentaStix), so he stays put.
7. Then, when he's about to go out, point to the outside of the crate...
8. ... Say 'out', and
9. Lure him out with a treat

OMD! tips:

1. Stay close to the crate, but not constantly looking. Just read a magazine or something.
2. Do not try to go too fast and set him up for failure by demanding he stays longer than he's comfortable. You'd just slow down progress as he will start resisting the crate.
3. As you start to increase the time, introduce treats that take longer and longer to consume (e.g. a tightly stuffed Kong. For tips, Google 'Kong stuffing')

STEP IV: STAY A BIT (CLOSED DOOR)

Goal: This time, you will get the dog used to stay in a closed crate.


Method: Start with just 20 seconds, then **gradually** increase the time he stays in.

Do not increase the duration until he reliably stays at the current duration 8:10 times. Go back a step at the first sign of discomfort.

1. Say 'go to bed'

2. Point to the crate
3. (Dog goes in)
4. Give him a distracting treat that will engross his attention (e.g. DentaStix).
5. Discreetly close the door behind you.
6. When he's finished with the treat, wait for the instant he notices the door is closed.
7. Then, give him another DentaStix or other distracting chew.
8. When he's finished eating, if he's not settled down,
9. ... Say 'out'
10. Open the door
11. Lure him out with a treat

OMD! tips:

1. As durations increase, give yourself a comfortable spot close by (so crate does not come to mean social isolation) so you can stay productive whilst crate-training. I just grab my laptop or a book, and work next to the crate.
2. Stay close to the crate, but not constantly looking. Just read a magazine or something.
3. Once in a while, leave a 'slow-eating' treat behind, like a bone or a tightly packed  Kong, or even smearing one bit of crate walls with peanut butter. Open the door whilst he's eating it, so that HE decides

STEP V: STAY A BIT (DIFFERENT ROOM)

Goal: Now, you'll get the dog used staying in a closed crate whilst you're out of the room.

Method: Do not increase the duration until he reliably stays at the current duration 8:10 times. Go back a step at the first sign of discomfort.

1. Say 'go to bed'
2. Point to the crate
3. (Dog goes in)

4. Give him a distracting treat that will engross his attention (e.g. DentaStix).
5. Discreetly close the crate door behind you.
6. Discreetly leave the room, close the door behind yourself
7. Immediately come back
8. Hang around until the dog has nearly finished his chew, then
9. ... Say 'out'
10. Open the door
11. Lure him out with a treat

Repeat all the steps above, each time **gradually** increasing the time you stay out of the room.

OMD tips:

1. Do not make a fuss when he goes out after a longer period. It's not like he had a stint in jail. He just went to his bedroom for a bit, and you are teaching him that it's perfectly mundane and safe.
2. When you come back, hang around a little so that your return doesn't mean the door instantly flies open. Just flip through a magazine for a few seconds or something.

Caution:

1. Do not leave Rex unattended with a bone or raw hide. It could splinter, or he could choke;
2. Regularly inspect your toys for signs of chipping/damage, and replace them immediately if you see any.

THE DON'TS OF CRATE TRAINING

Caution:

1. Don't drag the dog into the crate. ALWAYS lure him there.
2. Don't use the crate as time-out/punishment zone.
3. Don't use the crate as a solution for separation anxiety.
4. Don't leave the dog in a crate for more than 4 hours.

1. & 2. DRAGGING THE DOG INTO THE CRATE OR USING THE CRATE AS PUNISHMENT

Risks:

You run the risk of the dog:

1. Developing an aversion to the crate, thus slowing crate training down tremendously;
2. Developing fear aggression towards you around the crate, thus signing up for potentially a lot of time-consuming remedial training and jeopardizing your relationship with the dog; and
3. Never learning to politely comply when you ask him – if he's pushed in there, he won't learn.

Alternative: Go through the crate training steps gradually, and do not ask him to go to/stay in the crate before he's ready.

3. USING THE CRATE AS A SOLUTION FOR SEPARATION ANXIETY

Risks/cause:

If your dog destroys objects/furniture when you leave him home alone, he may have separation anxiety, or he may be very bored (or both). The crate will exacerbate both issues.

Separation anxiety, if left unchecked, can lead you to trouble with your neighbours/landlord, expensive damage, and on the dog himself (a crate panic is not pretty).

Alternative solutions for separation distress:

Prevention/cure: Preventatively train your dog to staying home alone (check our hand-out about [home alone training](#)). If the problem is already established, please contact us for advice (info@ohmydogschool.nl).

Management: Use baby gates and leave him the run of one (part of a) room. Whenever you leave, sprinkle all sorts of challenging (but safe) puzzles and toys for Rex to entertain himself there.

4. LEAVING THE DOG IN THE CRATE FOR MORE THAN 4 HOURS

Risk: You are not fulfilling your dog's welfare needs if you impose excessively long stays in his crate.

Alternatives: If you need the crate for long unsupervised stretches, consider installing baby gates so he has the run of one (part of a) room.

You could also consider hiring a dog walker a few times a week, to break the spell. Please contact us for recommendations (info@ohmydogschool.nl).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

MY DOG WON'T TOLERATE ANY SEPARATION FROM ME, SO HATES THE CRATE

Cause: It could be that your dog has budding separation anxiety.

Solution: Get in touch before it gets worse, through info@ohmydogschool.nl. We'll put you back on the right track.

I WANT MY DOG TO SLEEP IN THE CRATE AT NIGHT FROM DAY 1, BUT HE'S NOT BEEN CRATE-TRAINED

Crate in bedroom solution: Take the crate in your bedroom at night, then gradually, night by night, move it closer to the door, then close the door behind it, and keep moving the crate to its ultimate destination. This way, he's only getting used to the crate. Not the crate AND isolation.

Stuff the crate with lots of safe chew toys and very comfortable bedding.

If he gets too upset: If he gets really upset by the crate (not just the first few minutes of protesting), you risk creating an aversion to the crate. Then consider having him sleep in your bedroom in a basket, (and going through the crate training steps before making him sleep in the crate at night) or using baby gates (see below).

If he's just protesting (less intense), just ignore him and hopefully he'll soon sleep for a few hours.

Baby gate solution: If the reason you need him in the crate at night is to avoid giving him the free run of the house, having him sleep in a basket behind baby gates in a safe area. If you are still potty training, consult our [potty training hand-out](#).

FINAL WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

Like all skills, you need to keep start small, work your way up, and then reap the benefits.

Even if the crate training is well established, don't forget to reward your dog with attention/treats, etc. whenever he's in his crate, especially if he is calm.

If you feel stuck, contact us for advice (info@ohmydogschool.com).

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- 🐾 Potty training hand-out
- 🐾 Socialisation checklist
- 🐾 Home alone hand-out