



# MARLTON ANIMAL HOSPITAL, P.A.

“WE CARE”

PAUL LUKIANOVICH, VMD

9 W. MAIN STREET  
MARLTON, NJ 08053  
(856) 983-5350  
Fax: (856) 983-3655

## Crate Training

For many dog owners – those who wish to speed up the housetraining process, or those who are still experiencing problems with housetraining after a couple of weeks – short-term close confinement is an essential ingredient of housetraining. Crate training is one of the most efficient and effective ways to housetrain an adult dog or a slow learning puppy. With untrained adult dogs, with appropriate diligence and rewarding of appropriate behavior, it is literally possible to solve the problem within a few days.

Confining the puppy or dog to a crate for short periods reduces the likelihood that there will be anything to clean up. Dogs do not like to soil their resting/sleeping quarters, and if given adequate opportunity to eliminate elsewhere, they will do so. Temporarily confining a dog to a small area strongly inhibits the tendency to defecate and markedly reduces the likelihood that they will urinate. However, there is a far more important aspect of crate training. If a dog does not eliminate while it is confined, it is highly likely to eliminate soon after it is released, i.e., the dog will eliminate when the owner is present, enabling them to praise the dog at the time of appropriate elimination – critical to quick success. Dogs of all ages learn faster when trained with positive reinforcement of appropriate behavior rather than when they are punished for inappropriate behavior.

In terms of the effectiveness of crate training, the smaller the area, the less likely the dog is to eliminate when confined. The ideal crate is one that is lightweight and collapsible (so that it may be moved from room to room) and just large enough for the dog to comfortably lie down and stretch out. For most dogs, a comfy towel or blanket as bedding will be much appreciated, while a water bowl should be provided for all dogs.

Much has been written on the advantages and disadvantages of water being available at all times. Although exceptions exist, in most cases dogs will only drink reasonable amounts of water if it's always available. In some cases, where water is just offered periodically, dogs will drink more than they otherwise would, resulting in increased urine production for the next few hours following, - this can contribute to difficulties housetraining. Another reason for water being available at all times is that there are quite a few diseases where increased amounts of water are crucial – diseases which can occur at any age, and may not show any other signs initially. For this reason, if you feel your pet is drinking excessively, an exam should be scheduled.

A major advantage of the crate training method is that it is not necessary to watch the dog at all the time. Except at night, a young pup should not be left in the crate for more than 45 minutes to an hour at a time. Similarly, during initial training, adult dogs should be taken out of the crate and given adequate opportunity to relieve themselves at least once an hour. Each time the dog is taken out of the crate, it is immediately called to the yard or walked on-leash outside and allowed five minutes or so to produce. If it does not urinate or defecate in the allotted time, it is simply led back indoors and popped back inside the crate. However, if it does

perform its business, then it is immediately rewarded with praise, affection, treats and play sessions. Moreover, it is fairly safe to let the dog have free run of the house for the next 30 – 45 minutes before it needs to be returned to its crate.

If crate training techniques are abused the house soiling problem will worsen. The crate is not intended as a place to lock up the dog and forget it for extended periods of time. If the dog soils the crate repeatedly because the owner left it confined for too long, the whole purpose is defeated. The reasons for short-term confinement to a crate are entirely different from the reasons for long-term confinement. The purpose of long-term confinement to a single room or cage in the owner's absence is to prevent the dog from soiling or destroying the house and to limit mistakes to a small protected area. Short-term confinement to a crate in the owner's presence is meant to prevent mistakes altogether, to inhibit the dog from urinating and defecating so that it will need to eliminate when released and provide the owner with the opportunity for positive reinforcement of appropriate behavior – the fastest way to train a pup or an adult dog.

If an owner forces the dog to soil its sleeping area, it will be harder to housetrain. This problem often occurs with dogs left outside in small runs and yards. The owner tends to forget that the dog is eliminating and fails to regularly clean up the feces. Consequently, the dog is forced to soil its living / sleeping areas, thus gradually losing its innate inhibitions.

Collapsible wire crates are especially useful because they are easily portable and can be set up in any room so that the owner can keep an eye on the dog and the dog will not feel isolated. The dog can be in the kitchen when meals are prepared, in the dining room at mealtimes, in the family room during the daytime, in the living room in the evenings and in the bedroom at night.

### ***Crate training at night.***

The dog may be left in the crate at night, as long as the crate is in (or close to) the bedroom. Adult dogs seldom experience difficulties making it through the night. For young puppies, this may be too much to expect. At nighttime, most pups will be able to last five or six hours. The pup should be taken outside last thing at night and first thing in the morning. By the time it is three to four months old, it will be able to get through the night without a mistake. In the meantime, the owner can take a number of extra precautions.

It is a good idea to put the pup in the crate some time before the owner goes to bed. Just before retiring, the owner should wake up the pup and take it outside for a "last chance" elimination. Since the pup has already been sleeping, it will probably urinate within a couple of minutes and then fall asleep soon after it is returned to the crate. For the first few weeks, the owner should set an alarm clock to go off five to six hours later, so that the pup may be woken in the early hours of the morning and taken to its toilet area. If the pup has not soiled the crate, the alarm may be set for a quarter of an hour later the following morning. As the week progresses, the alarm may be set for later and later in the morning. Within a week or ten days, the alarm may be set for the time that the owner usually gets up in the morning. Going through this regime teaches the pup that the owner will be letting them outside to relieve themselves when the pup has the urge, and hopefully the pup will anxiously await the owner even if the pup wakes up earlier than usual.

If on any morning the owner finds that the pup has soiled the crate during the night, this is indeed bad news. That evening the owner must set the alarm to go off at least one hour earlier for the next morning. It is very important that the pup is not forced to soil its crate, since it may lose the inhibition against soiling the crate again if this occurs regularly. Each mistake makes housetraining harder. A little effort in the beginning can save a lot of frustration and paper towels later on.

If the dog soils its crate three nights in a row, in spite of being taken outside an hour earlier each night, the crate training method should be abandoned at night. In this case, nighttime confinement should be in an area of the house where accidents won't destroy flooring – a single room with papers on the floor. The crate (with the door open) may be kept in the room as a place for the dog to sleep. During the day, continue with crate training as outlined previously.