



CONFINEMENT AND CRATE TRAINING

Animal guardians are often unsure whether they need to crate-train their puppies or newly adopted dogs or whether to simply confine them in a dog-proofed area during the early weeks or months following adoption. Crate training helps with the following:

- Housetraining: Prompts Sparky to hold bladder and bowels when unsupervised to expedite housetraining.
- Chew Training: Prevents Sparky from chewing furniture, walls and anything else except the chew toys he is crated with in order to form good habits.
- Settling Down: Patterns Sparky to be inactive when alone.
- Preparation for Possible Close Confinement: Dogs that are used to close confinement are less likely to be stressed when caged during a guardian's hospital stay or travel.

Chewing and activity management can be accomplished with a well dog-proofed room or an exercise pen if Sparky is solid in his elimination habits. If Sparky is shaky on housetraining however, it's better to crate-train him as the close confinement will discourage urination and defecation. To get the crating effect, the crate should only be large enough for Sparky to stand up and turn around. An ex-pen, dog-proofed room or too-large crate allows Sparky to use one end as bathroom area and the other end as bed.

How to get Sparky Used to his Crate

Begin by making the crate comfortable with a nice crate pad or blanket. Encourage Sparky to enter the crate by dropping a couple of treats at the back of the crate. Feed him meals in the crate, always with the door open. Using heavy string, tie an attractive stuffed chew-toy to the inside rear of the crate so Sparky must lie in the crate in order to chew on the toys.

After a few days of this, begin teaching Sparky to enter and exit on cue. Say "into bed" or "into the crate", then place a treat inside the crate, and praise Sparky when he enters the crate and eats the treat. Once he's done with the treat, instruct him to leave the crate with the cue of choice. Encourage Sparky to come out of the crate and when he does, praise him, but don't provide food or treats for exiting.

Once Sparky is entering and exiting the crate on cue, it's time to close the door. Play the in and out of the crate game, close the door after Sparky has entered and feed him treats through the grate for a minute or two before opening the door, repeating the process several times. Practice walking around the crate and room while Sparky is locked inside and provide him with treats. After a few minutes, open the door and allow Sparky outside. Make the whole process a positive experience for Sparky.

The next step is to add some real duration to Sparky's time in the crate. Rent a video and stuff a couple of chew-toys with something special and tasty. Set the crate up right next to the chair and just before sitting down to enjoy the movie, ask Sparky to enter the crate. Once he enters, give him the chew toys, close the crate door and start the movie. Leave a few times to get popcorn or a drink, but always come back within a minute or so. The first experience being in the crate for this length of time must be an overwhelmingly easy and good one.

Any noise, agitation or tantrum from Sparky should be ignored. At the end of the movie and if Sparky is quiet and settled in the crate, simply open the door and let him exit. Under no circumstances open the crate door if Sparky is misbehaving as this conditions bad behavior.

Behave very neutral when opening the crate door. All the good stuff should happen while Sparky is inside the crate and behaving nicely.

Spend a few days placing Sparky in the crate when home. Ignore any noise and provide interesting crate puzzles (i.e., chew toys) each time. When Sparky is going into the crate without fuss and no longer distress vocalizing, leave the house.

Leave for 1-10 seconds over and over for the first leaving home session. Then, over the next few sessions, gradually extend the time gone, from a minute to five minutes to 10 minutes, 15 minutes, half an hour, an hour, three hours, or four hours. Every now and then, depart for a short time frame to mix up the schedule. Depart and arrive without any fanfare. Tire Sparky out with vigorous exercise and training before the longest absences. It is important to gradually condition Sparky to being in the crate this way before using it in every day life.

If Sparky is soiling his crate, the first thing to try is removing the pad or blanket for a week – the porous material may be triggering elimination. Also be sure Sparky isn't left too long between bathroom trips thus forcing him to eliminate in his crate. Keep both Sparky and his crate scrupulously clean. It would also be prudent to have Sparky checked for a bladder infection if he is urinating really often.

Crate duration rules of thumb for puppies:

- 8 - 10 week old puppies: Maximum one hour at a time in the crate
- 11 - 12 week old puppies: Maximum two hours at a time in the crate
- 13 - 16 week old puppies: Maximum three hours at a time in the crate
- 17 - 20+ week old puppies: Maximum four hours at a time in the crate

Use a long-term confinement area for times longer than the puppy can hold in the crate. The kitchen is ideal confinement area – not too large, high traffic, and easy-to-clean floor. Confine Sparky with pet-proof gates – newspaper at one end; bed, food, water, toys.

Adult dogs can spend a maximum of four-five hours in a crate at a time.