

# Crate/Kennel Training

For Any Age

Visual Guide for all ages and training levels

# WELCOME

We are excited to share in your family's journey together on this path to building a solid and lasting partnership with your dogs. No matter if this is your first encounter with a trainer or just a new way to train with us, we welcome you to the Frolic family!

This handout is meant to supplement your personal lessons with your trainer on the topics you've already covered.

## TERMS WE USE

Here are some common terms we will be using in these handouts, along with their definitions:

**Flick:** a quick wrist movement that offers direction so the dog feels the quick movement of the leash. Your wrist's range of motion should be approximately 6" without moving the elbow; like flicking a dish towel.

**Growl:** a vowel sound used as a "no" warning to stop a behavior; many clients use the word "hey" because it's short and easy to remember.

**Lure:** Can be a treat, noise, toy, or movement to grab their attention or create a positive association.

**Distractions:** Movement, smells, or sounds that may frequently make it difficult for your dog to comply with requests or rules. As your dog improves, you will gradually increase difficulty of the exercises by varying speed, distance, and volume.

**Mark/Praise:** A high, light tone that signals "great job" or "good choice". It does NOT mean release. An example would be praising a dog while it's in sit. In a sit, **VERBAL ONLY** praise works best. Praise for recall may involve squatting with verbal and petting.

**Release Word:** Can be any word you choose to let your dog know they can go free (e.g. "Break", "Out", "Let's Go". Avoid using common words like OK for release, as it is said too many times in normal speech and you can accidentally release your dog at the wrong time.)

**Set-ups / Scenarios:** Set-ups create situations / scenarios that allow you to be proactive. (Ex. Your scenario involves giving a warning prior to taking food off coffee table would be different lesson than teaching them to drop it after they've already taken it.)

**Spatial Pressure** - This refers to using your body position and movement to influence a dog's behavior. Use your body to create a sense of pressure or boundary to effectively: Redirect a dog's attention, Enforce boundaries or communicate expectations. By understanding and effectively using spatial pressure, you can enhance your communication with your dog and improve their overall behavior.

“Sometimes the most  
productive thing you can  
do is relax.” - Mark Black



# CRATE TRAINING BASICS

Proper crate/kennel training is a key investment in a dog's life. It provides them with a safe and secure space, especially when you're away. It's also useful when you have multiple dogs, even dogs that typically get along well, leaving them alone unsupervised can cause issues. This guide will help you teach your dog to love their crate, go in it on their own or with direction and stay in it willingly. You should never use crates as punishment, but want it to be a positive and safe space.

## Creating Opportunities

Teaching your dog that a crate is a great and safe space is easily done with multiple opportunities as well as dedicated sessions. Crate them often and in different scenarios. Easy examples of creating opportunities is when you go to the restroom, when you eat, for bedtime, post walks or after a play session. Crating at random times of day for varying amounts of time will show them that it's not a punishment, it's not forever and will create built in flexibility with your dog. Time spent in crates can be from 5 minutes to 8 hours - based on their ability to stay in there comfortably and quietly.

## Key Benefits of Crate Training:

- **Safety:** A kennel provides a safe haven for your dog, especially when left alone or unsupervised.
- **Potty Training:** Kennel training can help you establish a consistent potty routine.
- **Behavior Management:** A well-trained dog is less likely to engage in destructive behaviors like chewing, marking or digging.
- **Travel:** Kennels are invaluable for transporting your dog safely and comfortably as well as providing a secure and comforting space in an unfamiliar location.
- **Boarding, Vet and Grooming Visits:** Kennels are required for boarding or vet stays as well as at the groomers, so being comfortable in a kennel makes these experiences less stressful.



# CHOOSING A CRATE

There are many different types of crates/kennels, so choosing which type works for you and your pet is up to you. No matter the type of crate you choose, you need to ensure they can stand up fully without being cramped, and be able to fully turn around. Puppies that aren't potty trained should be confined to a sleeping area, preferably a crate that is not more than 1/3 longer than they are (they do make crates with adjustable dividers to move as they grow).

- **Size:** Ensure the kennel is large enough for your dog to stand up, sit down, and turn around comfortably. For puppies, you don't want it to be much bigger than they are until they are fully potty trained, to keep their activity level down until they can be let out.
- **Material:** Research the types of kennels and how you will be using them. They vary from metal/wire, plastic, fabric to wood. You may want more than one if you travel often and want to make it easier.
- **Location:** Place the kennel in an area of your home (preferably outside of your bedroom). This will also help with independence and confidence building for your dogs long term. With new puppies and at the beginning of potty training, you may want to have their kennel inside your bedroom temporarily, to quickly address potty or behavior issues, with the goal of moving it elsewhere as they grow.
- **Covers & Accessories:** Many dogs do well with bedding or blankets, as well as water or food bowls inside their crates, while others do not. Knowing your dog's personality and habits will help you decide what can safely be kept inside. Crate covers are also useful for dogs that need a bit more security to stay calm and quiet.



“The great thing about being with, having a dog, is it kind of forces you to be in the present because that’s definitely where they’re spending their time.”

– Jennifer Aniston (actor)



# Creating the Crate Dynamic

Before you begin, it's important to understand your dog's comfort level with the crate. If they're hesitant or fearful, take it slowly and make the crate a positive experience, but also know that you may need to encourage and help them push through the initial fear. You will keep your dog on a leash through this process, to make it easier to guide them in and out until they learn the command. The end goal is to be able to send the dog to crate from anywhere at anytime.

## Introduce the Crate

Place the crate in one or more dedicated areas of your home. Leave the door open and let your dog explore the crate at their own pace. Toss treats or a favorite toy inside for them to find or explore. Decide if bedding is a good option inside to make it cozy. If they are destructive or like to chew fabric, then you may want to avoid using anything that may contribute to a vet visit.

## The In/Out Drill

- **Start with short sessions.** With dog on leash walk them over to the crate and guide them inside. Do not use any words at this time, except to mark "Good" when they complete the action, as they won't know what the command is at first. You want to pattern the wanted behavior over and over first. Immediately walk them back out of the crate calmly.
- **Add the word:** Once they are going in and out of the crate/kennel easily, add the word you want to use for this behavior.(E.g. "Crate", "Kennel", "Bed" are common commands). Repeat the above steps using the command as association, marking with "Good".
- **Reward them with praise** for going in and out willingly. Remember to use your marker "Good" as praise when they are showing the desired behavior.

# Teaching the Release Command

- **Once your dog is comfortable** going in and out, start teaching them to wait for release
- **Place them in the crate** with leash guidance first. Then once they know the routine you can layer in your command. (If at first the dog is being overly resistant, feeding the leash through the back of the crate to provide better direction while giving lots of encouragement is often all that's needed.)
- **Mark with praise** once all 4 feet are inside and they stay
- **Close the door** and wait a few seconds.
- **Open the door and if they stay**, say your release word and let them out calmly.
- **If they try to exit the crate before you say your release word** quickly close the door and wait a few seconds before trying again. Alternatively, if the dog looks like it may want to rush out of the kennel when the door is open, use spatial pressure (quickly move towards it in an upright position) and then you can back up and remove the spatial pressure if the dog stays or goes back into a sit while still in the kennel.
- **If the dog exits the crate before you can shut the door**, take the leash and calmly and gently guide them back inside. Use your crate/kennel command if you are at that stage of the process.



# Adding the Down Command

(Review the Sit/Stay Handout to teach the “Down” command prior to this exercise)

- Once your dog is consistent with the concept of crate command, add the “Down” command.
- Before closing the door, ask your dog to “Down.” If they comply, close the door and wait. If they don’t do the command, use leash pressure to guide them into a down.
- Mark and Reward them when they stay in the down position until you say your release word.



## Increase Difficulty & Duration

- As your dog becomes more confident with the exercise and expectation, gradually increase the duration of time they spend in the crate.
- **Start by adding more opportunities every day.** Building good habits for crate time will help your dogs state of mind and teach them to turn off and calm down. Crate them when you go to the restroom, then release them if they are calm using the above practiced techniques. When you go to the store, eat dinner, after every walk, adventure or good play session. Dogs, especially puppies, actually need more dedicated naps during the day. Adult dogs can sleep and nap for up to 16 hours a day.
- **Eventually, you’ll be able to leave them in the crate for longer periods.**
- **Raise the Difficulty/ Add Distractions:** Make it harder each time. Change the sides of crate you stand on or approach from, if you are in front of the dog or behind the dog, or use distance and practice until they become proficient at all angles. Start leaving the door open and repeat. Use pet’s name or misc words. Crouch and make noises or high voice sweet talk. Your dog should not move until you release it. If it does, guide it back in with leash or body pressure and repeat until it holds the “crate/kennel” command. This will help transition to being outside if strangers talk to your pet in public.

# Addressing Unwanted Behaviors in the Crate.

Whining and barking are two of the most common things people complain about when starting the crate/kennel training process. Most often it's with puppies, but older dogs can also exhibit these behaviors if they have rarely been crated. Your goal is to develop clear communication with your dog that the whining or barking is the unwanted behavior. Remember to remain calm and work your dog through the process.

**Be patient and remember:** Crate training takes time and consistency. Don't get discouraged if your dog doesn't immediately adapt.

## **Take a Moment to Assess:**

In the beginning, when your dog starts whining or barking, resist the urge to immediately respond. The behavior may initially increase, but for some dogs it can eventually decrease as the dog learns that it won't get attention. The dog (puppies especially) may take a moment to self-correct and settle down after 10-15 minutes. Do not remove your dog from the crate because he whines – wait until he is quiet. Reacting to his demands will teach him that whining works to get what he wants. Some dogs get very attached to people due to many factors and want their humans in close proximity. No matter the reason for the vocalizations, fully addressing this behavior as soon as possible will help you long term. If you run over to immediately let them out of the crate, you can inadvertently create issues like separation anxiety, which is a much more difficult behavior to modify down the road.



**Add a Correction:** If you have successfully implemented a correction system in other circumstances, you may correct your dog for whining, or showing other signs of stress. This means using something that will make a brief, sharp noise to startle your dog and disrupt their behavior against the crate. Start by saying your correction tone or the word, “No” then use the tool of choice to quickly, firmly and directly tap the crate (top, front or side makes no difference). This should startle them and disrupt the behavior during the process, but will not hurt or harm the dog in the process. If the dog stops and is quiet, give the dog calm and neutral praise, like “good”. Don’t overdo it, or you can unfairly build arousal in the dog. Remain consistent on saying “no” and then correcting. Do this every time your dog barks. The word “no” can become meaningless during this process if you say it without any sort of correction.

**If your dog whines or barks in their crate at night:** you can use a loud clap or a tool like a water bottle, noise maker or rolled up towel to quickly interrupt the behavior. Before using the tool, firmly say “No” or use a correction tone. The sudden noise or tool should startle your dog, quickly disrupting their unwanted behavior.



Over time, your dog will learn to associate the “No” command or correction tone with the unwanted behavior. Eventually, you’ll be able to have your dog quiet down in their crate with just a simple command.

**Get It Covered and Calm:** Sometimes the easiest thing that will calm a dog down in a crate is to cover it. You can use a specifically designed crate cover or a blanket (make sure it’s secured so the dog can’t drag it inside to chew on it). This provides an effect similar to a comfy cave, adding a sense of security and safety, allowing them to relax with limited outside input. You can also use things like white noise or calming music in the background to help block out other stimuli. Give them a toy with a portion of their daily food ration for them to enjoy as well.

# Remember: Consistency is key.

Keep practicing these drills regularly, and your dog will soon learn to love their crate. If you encounter any challenges, consult with your trainer for guidance.

If while doing these exercises your dog becomes hesitant to respond to the release word, it is better to have to repeat your release command more than once vs your dog having no impulse control and not waiting for the release. Say your release command again, crouch a bit and pat your legs as you back up to entice dog through movement and body language.

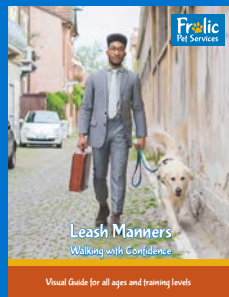
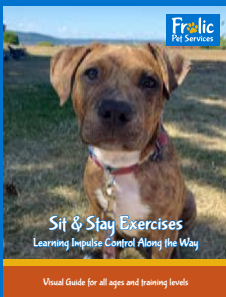
Make sure everyone can do the above drills and the same basics. Everyone in the family needs to use the same words for the same command and in the same calm delivery. At the beginning this will be important for the dog to learn and understand what you are asking and trying to teach them.

Example: If you been using “Crate” then “Good” for the above drills, then everyone should say exactly that, not “Pet name + crate” then “good boy/girl.” (Exception to this rule would be if you have a multiple dog household, where you need to command them individually.) Sometimes even the little differences in the beginning can be confusing for the dog. Keep it simple, consistent and concise. As your dog learns the commands and your meaning, there may be some natural leniency over time, but if your dog reverts, then have everyone go back to the same words and delivery.

Repeat this process for every family member or person you want to the dog to listen to, as that becomes a new component and variable for your dog. If you want your children to also be able to do this, guide them and supervise the drills. Help as needed but don't allow them to do drills unsupervised until they are proficient and the dog does not have other known behavioral issues, like biting or reactivity present when around them. Consult your trainer to help with biting/reactivity issues.



“A dog teaches a boy fidelity,  
perseverance and to turn around  
three times before lying down.”  
– Robert Benchley (humorist/actor)



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