

Quick Starts

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1. Crate Training for Puppies

Goal: The puppy enters the crate on cue and settles once inside.

Objectives: Reinforce the puppy for entering the crate and remaining quite in the crate, gradually increasing duration of time.

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Step 1: Let the pup see you have food and lure he/she into crate. Initially place the kibble at the front of the crate and gradually work towards the back as the puppy becomes more confident about stepping into the crate (a hesitant puppy may need to initially be reinforced for front feet in the crate and build from there). After the puppy is comfortable with going into the crate, only feed at the back of the crate. When pup turns around to face you, give a few more pieces of kibble. Do not feed when he/she comes out of the crate.

Step 2: As your puppy steps out of the crate place food towards the back of the crate to encourage the puppy to return to his/her crate. When the puppy turns around, feed again (but only if still inside the crate. Feeding for leaving the crate isn't necessary) If the puppy doesn't show a desire to leave the crate continue to feed them and build duration.

Step 3: Once your puppy understands the "crate game" stop luring him/her in with food and wait until the puppy chooses to go into the crate (you may need to wait a minute or so for this. The puppy is figuring out the "new rules to this game"). Once the puppy goes in and turns around reward with kibble. Continue to reward for duration.

Step 4: Close the crate door but don't latch it (hold closed with your foot or an assistant) and feed through door five or six times. Then pause for 5 seconds and start feeding again.. Repeat several times. Increase duration. Make sure the gate is held closed so the puppy can't open it. Feed several pieces at entrance when you open the door to reinforce being in the crate.

Step 5: Latch the crate door and repeat as above. Increase duration between feedings to ten to twenty seconds.

Step 6: Repeat step 5 one time and then start to walk away from crate, return, and feed through door. Repeat this step multiple times and start to build duration.

Step 7: Have the puppy go to his/her crate, leave the room, return to praise and feed intermittently. Continue to reward randomly for quiet, calm behavior in crate.

Key Points

Anytime you feed your puppy in a bowl and have a crate close by, feed inside the crate. Once the puppy starts running to his/her crate, add a cue.

Play the "crate game" 15 minutes before bedtime (this is mental exercise and will help the puppy get ready for bed).

Give the puppy a food-stuffed Kong if he has to be left in the crate for more time than he has been prepared for.

Adjustments for the Young or Tentative Dog

Sit by the crate (on the floor if possible) with a bowl of kibble and start to hand feed the puppy for being close to the crate.

Once the puppy appears comfortable with this, place some kibble just inside the crate entrance (so close to the opening the puppy can stick his/her head into the crate without stepping in).

Gradually move the kibble farther back into the crate (start off with just front feet inside the crate and work up to all fours inside the crate).

If the puppy seems bothered by the plastic floor of the crate, place a no-slip bath mat inside the crate (don't leave the bath mat inside the crate when the puppy is unattended. This is for training purposes only).

If you are using an elevated bed inside the crate, you may need to work on this separately.

Using higher value food rewards is also an option for a puppy who is struggling to adjust.

Dogs learn a lot from other dogs. If you have another dog in the house who loves his/her crate, you can also use that dog to help teach the puppy. When I do this, I only do it for one training session. It's important the puppy learns which crate is for them so the older dog has a place to go when they need a break from the puppy.

2. Ground Tethering (8-12 weeks)

Goal: With a mild distraction, the puppy will choose not to pull on the ground tether, instead keeping a loose leash

Objective: Create a reward history for the puppy not pulling on the leash (this will be a high rate of reinforcement so using kibble from a meal would be appropriate). A marker (clicker or "yes") should be used in this exercise.

Environment: This exercise should initially be taught in a low distraction environment.

Procedure: Handler stands on the leash that is connected to the puppy's collar. The leash should be long enough for the puppy to stand up and feel pressure on the collar but not long enough for the puppy to explore the environment (about 2 feet from the puppy's collar to the handler's foot). If you are handling a larger/stronger puppy, hold the leash in your hand or tether to a non-moving object. (**never tether a dog to an object that is movable**)

Handler remains stationary and allows the puppy to react to the ground tether (most puppies and dogs will automatically pull against any pressure on the collar)

Mark and reward the following desirable behaviors:

- Ceasing pull on the collar
- Looking at a distraction, but not moving towards it
- Looking to the handler

Key points:

Handler will offer food rewards close to their leg to reinforce not pulling on the leash

Handler strives to initially mark any reduced pulling on the collar to promote the puppy's understanding of moving towards the fixed pressure

Once the puppy is choosing to fully loosen their collar against the ground tether, the handler should begin only marking a fully loose leash/collar

After the puppy displays an understanding of "no pressure" we can add in mild distraction (the distraction should not excite the puppy)

3. Ground Tethering with Distractions (8-16 weeks)

After the puppy has demonstrated an understanding of no pressure on the collar, more difficult distractions can be added

Distractions should always be kept out of reach to the puppy (getting the distraction will reinforce pulling on the collar/leash)

Distractions further teach the concept of not pulling but also begins to teach impulse control

Choose your distractions wisely, start with low, then moderate and then difficult (we want the puppy to be successful)

If your puppy continues to pull towards the distraction, you need to either increase your rate of reinforcement or the value of your reward

If your puppy is really struggling, go back to an easier distraction and establish a stronger reward history

Do not increase the level of distraction until your puppy has been fully successful at their current level

Once your puppy is successful at all levels of distraction, you can go to hand tethering