

# AMERICAN HERITAGE

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## GERMAN SHEPHERD DOGS

### **Crate Training**

- Cheryn Preiss

All of our dogs are crate trained. We are all the happier for it too! I had mixed feelings about crate training long ago. I felt like I was locking my dog up in a little cage for most of his waking hours. Poor Calix, I thought, but I lived in an apartment in college and just couldn't take any chances. He was six weeks old, and didn't know the difference, right? Now Calix won't give up his kennel for anything. That is his bed, his sanctuary from the other dogs, his place to "chill out", and to hide when someone is in trouble. He feels safe in it. My apartment was saved, my roommate didn't lose a single pair of shoes, and Calix was housebroken in a few days. Since my first official crate training trial, all of my dogs are crate trained. Yes, that means Judy and I have crates all throughout our houses, one bed for each dog. They also function as a flat file for kennel paperwork, as end tables, and catch alls.

#### Benefits:

Our dogs are safe and secure when we aren't around to keep an eye on them. No one is in the trash, eating a pair of shoes, sleeping on the couch, or playing too hard. No fights with our edgy pregnant mommas either. They feel safe too. You know your house will still be in one piece when you return, and no puppy accidents to clean up.

Safer traveling. We can load up the kennels and tie them down. The dogs jump right in because they know the drill already. Less stress traveling, since they feel safe in their own kennels.

Guests are not overwhelmed with our dogs when they come over. Our dogs are quite content to leisurely hang out in their kennels while we have people over, including toddlers running around the house. Some people are quite intimidated by three or more dogs happily greeting them at the door.

Confinement. On occasion a pet requires quiet time to heal from an injury or illness. Already being crate trained, our dogs are more likely to confine themselves because they don't feel well. This helps both of us. Less stress, faster healing.

#### Drawbacks:

Home Decor. Crates do not normally go with the living room furniture.

Space. These are big dogs and they require big crates.

Separation Anxiety. Sometimes it happens. Probably not because of the crate, but some dogs do better with more space when mom and dad leave the house. Pay attention to excessive damage to the crate door and floor. Lots of scratch marks may indicate your pet does not appreciate the crate, or you leaving him home alone.

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Other dogs do better with separation anxiety by being confined to a small area where they feel safe. Talk to your veterinarian if you think your dog may suffer from separation anxiety.

We recommend that the crate be a plastic closed in type, not the wire type that he can see out of. The plastic crates take up more space permanently, and that can be a drawback if you plan to stop using it after your pet has been housebroken and obedience trained. These crates help your dog feel more secure, his own little room. The wire crates fold up nicely so they are easily stored. Unfortunately, he can see out all around him. He will know exactly what he is missing, and will not understand his limitations. He will feel caged, not safe and secure. Be sure to purchase a crate that your "full grown" puppy can grow into. This will avoid buying more than one size, when he out grows the first one. Our dogs sleep in Extra Large or Giant crates (depending on the manufacturer). So good luck with his training (and your training) and enjoy your clean floor.

Now the training. Are you ready? It is probably the simplest training you will ever do.

It is easier to start crate training with puppies because you can just pick them up and put them inside. At night I usually add an old article of clothing I have been wearing that I can sacrifice (t-shirts, socks). My smell is on those articles of clothing. This helps with bonding, and the puppy feels close to someone. Every time you put your puppy into the crate, Give him a command of "kennel" or "crate", add a very happy "Good Dog" and a little treat. This is positive reinforcement. It won't take long before your puppy associates the "kennel" with getting a treat and happy praise. Soon the simple command will have your puppy running to bed.

Tips:

Do not FORCE a dog into the crate. That is negative reinforcement, and your dog will associate the two. A little encouragement may be necessary the first few attempts. If your dog resists, take a break. Try a few minutes of fetch, or just good old fashion love and attention. Then try again. Didn't work after a few tries? Maybe we need to take a longer approach.

Always leave the kennel door open for your puppy to explore while you are home. Let him know it is okay to come and go as he pleases when you are there for supervision.

Feed your puppy inside the kennel with the door open. If you are having a little trouble with your puppy taking to the kennel, just be patient and coax him along the way. If you rush the process or force your puppy, neither of you will be happy. This defeats all of the benefits of crate training, and begins to fall into the cruel department.

If your puppy is whining and crying a lot don't let your puppy out when whining. Wait until there is a quiet moment then let him out. Otherwise you will teach him that whining gets the door opened, and he will not stop. On the other hand, if your puppy is usually quiet while in the kennel, whining is a good indication that he needs to go outside now. This is worthy of positive reinforcement.

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Crates are not to be used as a tool for punishment. This will not encourage a puppy in training or an adult dog to continue using the crate as a safe haven or their bedrooms. They will associate it as being locked up. Two very different points of view.

Do not OVER USE the crate. Crates are for the benefit of you and your dog. Dogs require lots of exercise and loving attention. Locking a dog into a crate for long periods of time is not healthy. Your dog will become frustrated from lack of exercise, as well as develop health concerns. This ladies and gentlemen, is when a crate becomes a cage, and the practice becomes cruel.

That is it. That is all. Congratulations, you've just crate trained your puppy! Now my dogs run for their kennels when I turn off the TV set or my computer, grab my keys, or say good night. I don't even use the command "kennel" for my older dogs. Everyone still gets a good scratch behind the ears and a treat for good measure.

If you have any questions, or even suggestions please feel free to contact me at [cheryn@ahgsd.com](mailto:cheryn@ahgsd.com)