



Soiling in the Crate or Kennel

Although using a crate to help with house training is generally very successful, there are instances where it fails. Those situations can involve dogs that never had an opportunity to eliminate anywhere other than where they eat, sleep and live and have damaged the instinct to eliminate outside their living quarters. Examples include dogs and puppies from high volume breeding facilities, pet shops. Other times it can be related to illness or puppies left too long in the crate and unable to hold themselves. The longer this behavior continues, the more likely it is to become an established habit. Crate soiling is frustrating and can lead to owners giving up the dog or moving it outside to live. This article will provide ideas on how to re-instill that instinct for cleanliness.

For puppies or dogs that have just begun crate soiling, you may still be able to use the crate as a valuable tool. Below are the things to consider.

Step One:

First talk to your veterinarian to rule out any medical problems. Valuable time can be wasted treating a problem as behavioral, when it is instead medical.

Step Two:

Avoid any type of punishment for the behavior. No matter what you may have heard, punishment can actually cause crate soiling, and will do nothing to create a positive relationship with your dog (*see handout "AVSAB Statement on Punishment"*)

Step Three:

Ensure you are following all of the basics for housetraining. If the kennel is soiled when you awake in the morning, try to take the dog outside later in the evening, or during the night. Schedule regular feeding times so you can anticipate when the dog will need to eliminate and look at the type of food you are feeding. If you are asking the dog wait too long, it may be necessary to arrange for someone to come and walk the dog during the daytime. (*See our handout: "House Training Your Puppy" and "Training Your Pet to Accept a Crate"*).

Dogs that have established a habit of crate soiling will require a different approach.

Remove the dog from the crate (since they eliminate in it anyway), set up in a specially prepared area and follow one of the options below:

Option 1

- Set up an x-pen in an easy-to-keep- clean room.
- Put a tarp or plastic under the entire x-pen area.
- Put newspapers (or puppy pads, etc.) over the area.
- Place the dog's crate (door should be left open), water, toys in the pen. Most dogs will sleep in the crate if given the choice. If the dog eliminates in the kennel, remove bedding.
- As the dog begins to eliminate in one area of the pen, gradually reduce the papers on the floor from the rest of the pen (do this very slowly).

- If the dog is eventually expected to eliminate indoors (papers, puppy pads, dog litter box), this is the time to introduce everything to the pet.
- If the dog is expected to go outside, owners should continue to take the dog out frequently and immediately reward outside elimination with treats and praise.
- Once the dog is going in the desired spot (outside or inside) owners can remove rest of paper.
- Gradually re-introduce the dog to confinement in the kennel for short periods of time. If the dog soils in the crate, remove the dog to avoid continuing the crate soiling cycle.

Option 2

- Select a small room (bathroom, laundry room) with a floor that is easy to keep clean and place a baby gate across doorway. If dog jumps over gate you can either stack two gates together or use a specially designed tall gate to prevent the dog from escaping. Don't close the door because it often causes the dog to scratch or dig at the door.
- Put newspapers (or puppy pads, etc.) over the area.
- Place the dog's crate (door should be left open), water, toys in the room. Most dogs will sleep in the crate if given the choice. If the dog eliminates in the kennel, remove bedding.
- As the dog begins to eliminate in one area of the room, gradually reduce the papers on the floor from the rest of the room (do this very slowly).
- If the dog is eventually expected to eliminate indoors (papers, puppy pads, dog litter box), this is the time to introduce everything to the pet.
- If the dog is expected to go outside, owners should continue to take the dog out frequently and reward outside elimination with treats and praise.
- Once the dog is going in the desired spot (outside or inside) owners can remove rest of paper.
- Gradually re-introduce the dog to confinement in the kennel for short periods of time. If the dog soils in the crate, remove the dog to avoid continuing the crate soiling cycle.

These above options also work well for dogs with medical issues or elderly dogs that develop some type of incontinence.

Things to Remember

1. Keep the confinement area as clean as possible to help the dog become habituated to a clean environment.
2. This does not replace house training. The dog should always be directly supervised whenever free in the home. Owners can allow the dog to drag a leash or tether to dog to themselves to help.

Kennel and Crate Stress

Some dogs become stressed and anxious anytime they are confined in a crate or kennel. What owners mistake for house training issues are instead the results of environmental stress. These dogs may instead need confinement a dog-safe room or assistance from a qualified specialist to accept crating as a positive experience. (See our handout "**Finding a Dog Trainer or Behavior Specialist**").

With patience and time, the majority of dogs can eventually learn to at least tolerate their crates. The goal of most owners is to eventually allow their dog unsupervised access to the entire home. Until then, a crate can be a useful tool.