DOG PLUS ME · THE FIX SERIES · NO. 02

# The Crate Training Fix

The night-by-night plan for calm, quiet nights and a dog who walks into the crate on their own. For new puppies, adult dogs and rescues.

Reward-based | Night-by-night plan | 14 real-life situations | 10 printables



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START HERE · 2 MINUTES

# You don't need to read this whole guide tonight.

You need the parts that match your dog. Find yourself below and follow that path. Everything else is there when you need it.

| IF THIS IS YOU… | READ THIS, IN THIS ORDER |
|---|---|
| **New puppy, just got home (or arriving soon)** | Tonight (Ch. 1) → the Cry Code (Ch. 2) → Chapters 3–8. Follow the 14-Day Plan (Ch. 8). |
| **Your dog is crying right now, tonight** | The night setup in Ch. 1 and the Cry Code table in Ch. 2. That's enough for tonight. Tomorrow, Ch. 6. Screaming as the door shuts? Situation 1. Up at 2–4 am? Situation 2. |
| **Adult or rescue dog** | Ch. 1 → Ch. 2 → Situation 9 → the Door Ladder (Ch. 5), starting at Rung 1. Ex-puppy-mill dog? Read Situation 9 before you ever close the door. |
| **You work full-time** | Situation 10 first → Ch. 7 for crate schedules by age → Ch. 1 for setup. A crate is never the plan for a full workday. |
| **"It's gone wrong"** | Go to Part 3, "Find your dog. Fix that." It sends you to the right situation. Used to love the crate, now refuses? Situation 8. Any panic, drooling or injury? Part 4, "When to call a pro", first. |
| **You're exhausted and just want to start** | Do the 24-hour checklist in Ch. 1. That's it for today. |

## How this guide is different

- **It tells you what each cry means.** Potty, Protest, Panic or Pain. You'll learn to tell them apart, and what to do about each.
- **It gives you rules, not vibes.** Exact crate times by age, how long a session lasts, when to move up, and when to step back.
- **It covers the hard cases.** Screaming, 3 am wake-ups, soiled crates, escape artists, working owners, rescues.
- **It's kind.** No "cry it out", no bark collars, no spray bottles, no crate as punishment. A scared dog can't learn (Ch. 2 explains why).

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

Every recommendation is based on published guidance from veterinary schools and hospitals, welfare charities and peer-reviewed research, in plain steps. Where sources disagree, we take the safer, welfare-first position. Sources are listed at the back. This guide is educational and doesn't replace your vet.

HONEST EXPECTATIONS

# What's normal: honest timelines

You'll see guides promising a crate-trained dog in a weekend, or "3 nights and done". We won't. Here's the truth, so you can measure your progress against reality instead of a sales pitch.

| YOUR DOG | FIRST WIN | TYPICAL TIME TO CRATE-TRAINED* |
|---|---|---|
| Puppy who has seen a crate before | A calm, door-open crate visit on day 1 | Often 1–3 weeks of consistent practice |
| Puppy or adult brand new to crates | Walking in for a treat, door open, within days | Longer. "Days to weeks", depending on age, temperament and history |
| Dog with a bad crate experience (scared or panicked before) | Relaxed near the crate, door open | Much longer. Start again from Rung 1 (Ch. 5) |
| Ex-puppy-mill dog | Resting in a quiet room with the crate open | Weeks to months. Some of these dogs should never be crate-trained, and a pen is the right answer |

*"Crate-trained" is our own standard: for 7 days in a row, your dog walks in on cue, settles within a few minutes, and stays quiet for as long as you need, within the age limits. Until then, your dog is "in training", even if things look great.

## Nights, honestly

- **The first week is the loud one.** One study of 60 puppies (6–10 weeks old) found that more than 70% of those sleeping alone disturbed the household on their first night. The average was about 5–6 disturbed nights over 2 months, mostly in the first week (Taylor & Mills 2007). It's one small study and your puppy may differ, but if your week one is loud, you're in good company.
- **Night potty breaks are normal.** Puppies under about 4 months usually need 1–2 night breaks, so plan for them. Most sleep through between about 16 and 20 weeks; some need a night trip until about 5 months.
- **Adults are different.** They get a last trip at night and one first thing in the morning. No source sets an overnight number for adults, so we don't invent one.

## Three things that will happen (and are normal)

1. **Night 2 or 3 can feel worse than night 1.** You're more tired by then, and that's normal. Stick to the plan.
2. **A great few days, then a bad session.** It's not failure. It's data. Drop a rung, shorten the session, and climb again (Ch. 5).
3. **Rung 1 might take minutes, or several days.** Both are normal. Building to 30 minutes calm with you out of sight can take days or weeks.

READ THIS IF YOU FEEL GUILTY

# You haven't ruined your dog.

Maybe they screamed for an hour. Maybe you shut the door too soon, or let them "cry it out" because someone told you to. Now you're wondering if you broke the crate for good.

You didn't. Here's why.

## Dogs relearn

Your dog learned "the crate is bad news" from a few bad experiences. They can learn "the crate is where the good stuff is" the same way: one good experience at a time. That's all crate training is, for every dog.

A dog with a bad start usually needs more time, not a different dog. You go back to an easier step. You make the crate pay. You quit while they're winning. Then you climb again.

## How to start again

1. **Stop closing the door for a while.** Door fixed open. No pressure.
2. **Make the crate the best room.** Meals, a special chew, surprise treats dropped in when they're not looking (Ch. 4).
3. **Start the Door Ladder at the rung where they're calm.** For many dogs that's Rung 1 or 2 (Ch. 5).
4. **Use the Crate Reset if your dog changed their mind.** Situation 8 walks you through it step by step.

YOU'RE ON TRACK IF

- They'll eat near or in the open crate
- They sniff it, or walk in for a treat
- Each week is a little calmer than the last

GET HELP IF

- They pant, drool or scrabble in the crate
- They've hurt their mouth or nails
- Panic keeps coming back, even on easy rungs

If it's the right-hand column, that's not your failure either. Some dogs need a pen or a gated room instead, and a vet's help. Part 4, "When to call a pro", tells you exactly when.

THE ONE THING TO REMEMBER

Guilt makes owners rush, to "prove" the crate is fine. Rushing is what hurts. Slow and boring is what fixes it. You're reading this page, so you're already doing better than you think.

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