



# K-9 Stray Rescue League

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<http://www.dogsaver.org/k9srl>



K-9 Stray Rescue League would like to help you in any way we can with your new pet. To that end we've written some suggestions to help with many common behavior problems people deal with. Please know that while these suggestions may help you solve the problem, some issues may require more assistance than we can provide. In that case we recommend seeing a qualified animal behaviorist for a behavior consultation. If you need more assistance than this handout provides, please call us to review the problem and if it requires behavioral expertise we will refer you to a behaviorist in the area.

## Crate Training

Imagine handing car keys and your car to your seven year old and expecting nothing bad to happen. Pretty hard, right? Why, then, do we imagine we can leave a puppy loose and unsupervised in our house and expect nothing bad to happen? The same logic applies. We prevent our children from driving until they can be responsible and have had lessons, so it stands to reason that we should prevent our puppies from soiling the house and chewing everything in site by confining them until they learn the rules and mature enough to be trustworthy. A crate is the simplest and most humane way to handle this with our dogs.

Having a crate allows you to prevent bad habits from forming. If a dog never chews a shoe during the first year of his life the odds are pretty good that it won't occur to him to do it when given the opportunity at a later age. However, if they develop a habit of chewing shoes while young, they will be more likely to always see a shoe as a potential toy. Diligence on your part for a relatively short time when you first bring a dog home promises years of problem free living with your dog, but if a bad habit is allowed to form you might spend years battling it.

House training is made especially easy with the use of a crate. Dog's are born with the instinct to keep their den clean so confining a dog in a crate prevents the dog from relieving himself until you take him outside. Please see the hand out on house training for more in-depth information on the subject.

The crate is not only a good way to keep your dog and your belongings safe, but it helps promote a better bond with your dog. It's hard to bond with a dog who has shredded your new leather couch! Prevent things like that from happening so you can focus on forming a positive relationship. When you feel your dog is behaving well in the house you can try giving him short periods of unsupervised house freedom. Extend the time if all goes well, and eventually you can eliminate the crate if you choose. You might just find that your dog will object, though. Many dogs prefer to sleep in their crate!

Hopefully we've convinced you that the crate is a good thing. If you're ready to give crate training a try we recommend the following:

- § Make sure the crate is the proper size, which means your dog can stand and turn around comfortably. For purposes of house training you don't want a lot of extra space. If introduced and used properly the crate will become a den for your dog, a place where he feels safe and can

get away from things if he chooses. To make sure that happens, you never want to use the crate as punishment. A dog who tends to chew the couch can be crated as a preventative when you can't supervise him, but a dog who has just chewed up the couch should not be placed in the crate for hours as a form of punishment.

§ Dogs are social animals and therefore it is cruel to isolate them. For this reason we recommend an open wire crate placed in a well trafficked area of the house. A baby gate in the doorway of a small room is an acceptable alternative if the room is dog-proofed. A closed room, basement, or garage is not a good idea because it is unsafe and can contribute to separation anxiety.

§ Start by telling him "kennel" or "go to bed" and toss a small treat in the crate. At first he should follow the treat in, but if you always give him a treat for going in he'll start to anticipate it and he'll go in and wait for it when you give the command. The first several times you should just leave the crate open so he can come and go as he pleases. After awhile you can shut the door briefly. A toy could also be put in to distract him from the fact that you're closing the door. As time goes on, toys can also help alleviate boredom if he's in there for awhile. Do this while you're at home for short periods of time and then when you actually have to leave your dog will be more likely to be calm.

§ Always feed your dog in his crate. As he begins to anticipate this he'll start diving into the crate when he sees you pick up his dish. It is also another positive association - good things happen in the crate!

§ Be careful not to reward your dog as he gets out of the crate. This might make him start to bark or dig to get out so he can get treats. Also, completely ignore any nuisance barking. It might take awhile, but your dog will learn that expending calories on barking does no good when he's in there.

§ Don't make a big deal about putting him in or taking him out. It should be a very matter-of-fact process. Making a production of it will likely stress the dog and may contribute to the formation of separation anxiety.

If all goes well your dog will become comfortable and calm in his crate in a relatively short time and you can rest peacefully in the knowledge that your dog and your house are both safe.