

Points on Pets: For a pup, a crate is great

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: Our friends keep their dog in a crate in their kitchen during the entire day when they are at work and at night when they are asleep. Although their dog seems well-adjusted, this seems very confining to us. Since we are thinking about getting a puppy, our friends are pressuring us to get a crate.

Do you recommend crates? If we get a dog, we do not want him to feel like a prisoner in his own home!

A: Although you will likely find varying opinions regarding the use of crates, many veterinarians highly recommend their use, especially for puppies. A crate is a safe place out of the busy traffic where a young puppy or an older dog can avoid the stresses of everyday living in a hectic household. It truly becomes the dog's safe haven. Many older dogs, even with free roaming privileges, voluntarily use their crates while resting during the day and sleep in them during the nighttime. Many owners state that they believe that their dogs seem to appreciate having a safe place of their own.

Of course, crates provide a very safe place to put a pet while it cannot be directly supervised. Quiet times in a crate can help curb a young puppy's aggressiveness. Knowing that your new puppy is in a safe place while you are not home will greatly reduce your amount of worry about what your puppy might be getting into while you are away. It is also comforting to know that your new puppy cannot harm himself while you are gone from home.

Many new puppy owners have reported that using a crate make housebreaking easier. Most dogs do not like to soil the place where they sleep and rest while not playing. You should get in to the habit of taking your new puppy outside as soon as you remove him from his crate. Most puppies learn the routine very quickly - leave the crate, go outside, urinate and defecate, get a treat, then play.

Crate-trained dogs can be easily restrained without being stressed while recovering from illnesses or surgery. Considerate homeowners put their dogs in their crates when visitors are present. More and more motels and hotels are now welcoming crate-trained dogs. Crates can also be used to safely transport dogs in automobiles. Dogs should never be put in crates to punish them. Being in a crate should always be a pleasant experience.

While your dog is allowed to roam freely throughout your house, you should leave the crate door open. Most dogs eventually go in and out of their crates without encouragement. They learn to enjoy their safe places. Purchasing a crate is a great investment.

Q: What is the term given to people who have a fear of animals? Our young son seems to have an abnormal

fear of every animal. As far as we know he has never been harmed by an animal. Will he outgrow this fear?

A: The term for "fear of animals" is "zoophobia." Zoophobia is one of the most commonly reported fears, particularly among young children. Of course phobias are irrational, persistent fears that cause affected people to act irrationally. Total avoidance of the feared thing is usually seen. Most people cannot explain why they are fearful, they just are.

Children who fear animals should not be forced to be near pets or put into uncomfortable situations involving animals. Forcing interactions with animals usually only makes the situation worse. Most children with zoophobia eventually outgrow their uneasiness as they mature and start to realize the benefits of animals within their lives.

Send an e-mail or write to Pets, P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112-0190. Only questions of general interest will be answered in this column.

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