

Crate Games

Game 1

With the crate door open, drop some treats outside the door, as well as just inside the crate. Let puppy eat the treats, and toss a couple more all the way to the back of the crate.

If puppy doesn't go all the way in, play this game a few times each day until they warm up to their crate. Don't close the door just yet – you don't want puppy to feel trapped

Once puppy is happily going in and out of the crate, move onto Game 2.

Game 2

Now you want to start building a hand signal for going into the crate (pointing towards the crate). Stand beside the open crate door and toss a treat inside the crate using your hand motion. At this point, puppy should follow the treat; if not, go back to Game 1.

If they did follow the treat into the crate, mark and toss another. Keep marking and rewarding as they eat, until they wait for another treat.

Stop feeding, add a release cue in a happy voice ("Okay"), and wait for them to come out. Play with puppy as a reward! This is to stop them from bolting out of the crate when you give the release cue. Remember not to close the door during this game.

Game 3

Now let's add a verbal cue. Stand by the open crate just like Game 2, only this time say a cue like "Kennel up!" as you point and throw the treat.

Be sure to say the word as you point, so that your pup realizes the hand signal and verbal cue mean the same thing, and eventually they will go in just with the word. This time when puppy goes into the crate, mark and drop several treats in the crate behind them while they're eating the first treat.

Do this a couple of times to reinforce how great it is to stay inside, and then use a release cue ("Okay") in a happy voice, and wait for them to come out. Play! This will begin the process of teaching the release cue to exit.

Practice this a few more times, and then test to see if puppy is getting the connection between the word and the action of going into the crate. To test their understanding, stand the way you did before and say your command, but this time don't move. If the pup runs into the crate, mark and reward! Mark and add a few more treats, and then release puppy as you did earlier.

If your dog understands, be sure to repeat the game a few more times!

If they don't run inside, go back to using the hand signal as you say the word a few more times before trying again without the hand motion. And keep the door open at all times for this game.



Game 4

Now that the pup is going in on cue, we want to start working on coming out with permission.

Using your verbal command (“Kennel up!”), send your dog into the crate, just like you did for Game 3. Mark and reward for going in, and then stand back up and wait to see what they’re going to do.

If they wait expectantly for more treats, mark and reward. Then wait again. If they run out of the crate instead, go back to Game 3 and keep playing until puppy seems like they’re expecting more treats after they go in.

After puppy has waited for treats a few times (for just a few seconds), then release them with a happy “Okay!” and play!

Be sure to practise this a few times a day for a couple of days before moving on.

Game 5

Now we’re upping the ante by closing the crate door while your dog is inside. Take it slowly at first, and keep it fun!

Use your command to send your pup into the crate, and give them some treats. While they’re eating, close the door. As they finish up, open the door, mark and reward, then release saying “Okay!” and let them out.

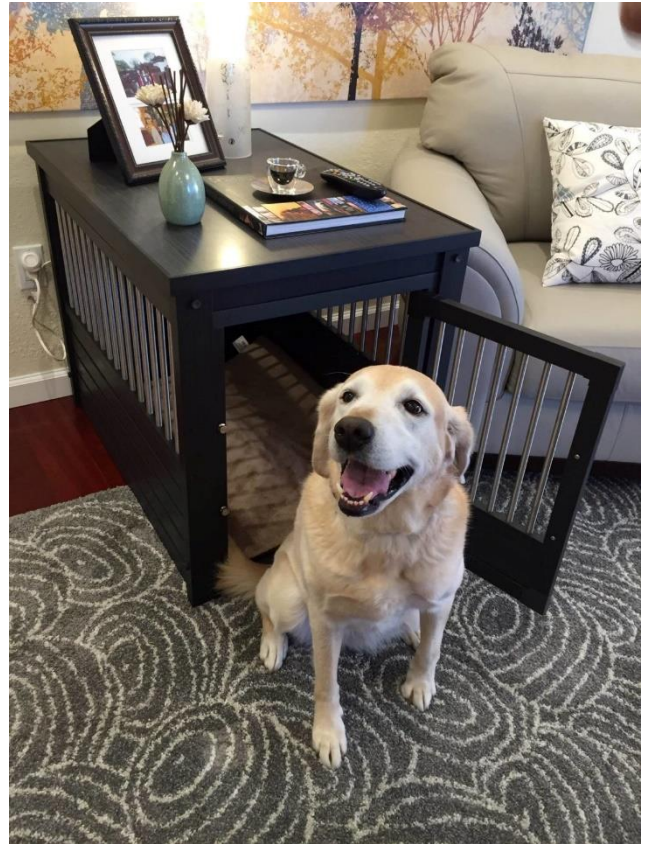
Gradually increase the time you keep the door closed. As you extend the time, let’s say over 10 seconds, mark and reward through the closed door.

Don’t give the pup a treat or open the door if they are fussing. If they’re barking or whining or pawing at the door, ignore them and wait for a break in that behaviour to release them.

If this break happens, don’t take so long to reward the pup and let them out next time.

Keep playing this game until they can stay calmly in their crate for at least 30 seconds while you stand nearby.

Then you can start mixing it up by moving away from the crate and back, testing if the pup is quiet or not. If not, next time make it easier again.



Game 6

Now it's time to teach puppy to respect the threshold of the crate, and not come out until you give permission. If you've been playing the earlier games, this should be easy for them, since you've been teaching them the release word all along. Follow the procedure in Game 5, but now we will require puppy to either sit or lie down inside the crate before being let out.

To do this, we are going to use a bit of a back-and-forth process to show the pup what you mean. This works best if you don't say anything; just let them figure out what to do by what happens.

Wait for puppy to sit or lie down, mark and reward, then reach for the crate latch.

If they get up, take your hand off the latch and stand back up. Wait for the pup to sit (or lie down).

When they sit, touch the latch again. If they don't get up, mark and reward through the bars to let them know that was the right decision. If the pup gets up, just repeat the process.

After puppy stays in position when you touch the latch, then start to open the door. Again, if they get up, just close the latch and stand back up. Repeat the above process.

Eventually, the pup will understand that you want them to stay seated, and you can get the door open a little bit while they're still in position.

At this point, swing the door open and release puppy right away. Play!

Practise this game until you can get the door all the way open and the pup doesn't move unless you release them.

This could take time, so be patient and remember to proceed slowly through the steps. If puppy starts to move at any point before being released, you should quickly close the door.

