

## The CRATING CRAZE; Convenient, Cheap and *Cruel*.

“When will we realize that the fact that we can become accustomed to anything, however disgusting at first, makes it necessary to examine carefully everything we have become accustomed to”. - George Bernard Shaw

Crates are one of the most misused tools in the pet world. I know that’s a bold statement considering we have bits, spurs, whips, chains, prods, shock, prong and choke collars. However, it’s the widespread and extensive use of crates or cages that qualifies them to be at the top of the list.

There is nothing healthy, fun, enriching or pleasant about being placed into a cramped cage, and being left there. Animals that are crated long periods become lonely, sad and aching to be set free. Pet owners need to hear what crate enthusiasts don’t want to talk about. The evidence and research, not to mention the protest of our whimpering and crying dogs, are telling us to stop. The truth is, no species is biologically designed to be warehoused in containers. Containers are best suited for storing blankets and items that don’t breathe.



*Cages, stalls and crates prevent animals from engaging in [normal healthy canine behaviours](#).*

The dog crate market is a growth industry generating billions of dollars. The region where sales are booming the most is in North America. The sheer number of animals, wild and domesticated, locked up and held captive in tiny spaces for hours, days, and years is tragic. Legally speaking, our pets are our property; so, if a person chooses to treat dogs as chattels, instead of valued family members, those dogs will end up in a world full of hurt.

The movement to restrict or ban the chaining of dogs, in both Canada and the USA, has been a forceful movement, with good reason. Millions of dogs are chained and isolated, outdoors, in garages and basements, out of sight and out of mind. Animal advocates deem this inhumane, and are campaigning in many regions to have chaining criminalized. Yet, a similar isolated existence for dogs, crated inside the home, has yet to raise any similar ire or legal scrutiny. Rather, the benefits of crating are ubiquitously hyped, while the harm is downplayed or ignored. It's time to revisit this. If we can defend imposing on our dog's severe stress and anxiety, for our own self-serving interests, what else can we rationalize? I know this sounds harsh, particularly to those who have been convinced they are doing the right thing. But a pet's mental health and physical safety, and their needs for social interaction and enrichment, can't be fulfilled while trapped at the end of a chain, or inside a crate.

Whether to crate or not, has created controversy in many circles, and even division within families. If you are reading this, you too may have conflicting feelings about crates and whether they are a good choice for your pets.

In North America, it is the norm to find animals in crates in private homes, daycares, and kennels as well as at sporting venues, dog shows, and veterinarian offices, grooming outlets, breeding facilities, puppy mills, research labs, shelters, rescues, pet stores, zoos, farms and transport vehicles. It is not rare for authorities investigating suspected hoarding situations, puppy mills and sham rescues to report finding animals confined to crates, injured and in various states of emaciation, covered in their own feces, and clinging to life. Billions of animals are locked in crates or in cages and this causes irreparable harm and agony to their physical and mental well-being. For this article, we will talk



about the species most of us share our homes with, which is dogs, and the metal and plastic crates we use to confine them.

Most pet owners are well meaning but unaware of canine body language and behaviours. A dog's resistance to being put in a crate is too simplistically viewed by many pet owners as the dog being defiant, stubborn or spoiled. Their emotional upset is dismissed or downplayed. The harm that comes from this is significant. Permission to force a dog into a crate is reinforced by the popular fallacy that crates help dogs feel calm, relaxed and safe. That dogs love their crates because they are like dens. The dog doesn't know he will love the crate, until you train him. This is marketing spin.

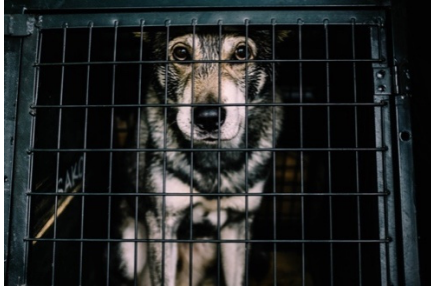
A den is a wolf's natural habitat, a home where she tends to her pups. A place mom and pups are safe from the elements and predators. A den can have multiple entrances, roomy interiors, and, most significantly, they are doorless. Suggesting a plastic or wire cage is comparable to a wolf's den doesn't make sense. Our dogs aren't spending their days dodging predators and hunting for food to feed their young. They live in houses, with us, their family. We feed them. This is where they should be able to feel relaxed, calm, safe and secure. A crate is unnecessary. The comparison between a den and crate is a false equivalency. But the myth lives on because it's human nature not to question, too closely, what benefits us, and we wish to be true.



*Have you heard the one about the crate salesman? He walks into a bar, at the 'Canine Fun & Games Club' and the dogs all look up. He says, "Good morning, Canids, I'm selling some real prime dens. I have all shapes and sizes, anybody interested?" They all perk up and say, "Sure, let's see what you've got." The salesman goes out to his*

*truck and brings in a plastic box with a barred door. He smiles and looks at the members. A Beagle looks at the Bloodhound and says, "I'm not even going over to sniff and investigate. I can smell the chemicals from here." The Border Collie says to the Greyhound, who nods in agreement, "If that's a den this club must be Buckingham Palace." The salesman looks confused. "But I was told you guys love these things. They make you feel safe, calm, secure and relaxed." The Belgian Malinois nudges the Doberman and says, "Yeah, we heard the same thing about you humans loving to get away to Sing Sing prison for a couple of years for a long and relaxed time out." They all roar with laughter, particularly the Husky who finds this a real howl. The pug says, "Oh come on guys, it doesn't look that bad." They all look at him, like he's nuts. "Well, maybe there are a few of you odd balls around that wouldn't mind withering away in one," Jack says with a wink to the Bulldog. "But leave me out!" The New Guinea Singing Dog starts to sing, "I've seen fire, and I've seen rain, I've seen lonely times when I could not find a friend, but I've never seen a door on a den." The German Shepherd says, "That's because the door isn't security; I am." "Amen to that," they all say in unison, while getting up slowly and going back to what they were doing. The salesman shrugs and decides to head over to the Afghan Grooming Salon. (He's heard they were easier to hoodwink.) The moral of the story? No matter how hard we want our dogs to love their crates, they don't. And they tell us that over and over again, if only we would listen.*

If you've been convinced that a crate is a safe and relaxing place to leave your dog when you're not at home, you're not alone. It's a narrative many hear and welcome. We, as a species, are very adept at bending and shaping the truth to make it more palatable. I know it's not typically recommended to make people feel guilty if you want to bring them on to your side, but animals suffer because we turn a blind eye to their discomfort. The second a crate door is closed against an animal's will, it becomes a recipe for long-term anxiety and the seed for [neurotic behaviours](#).



*Confining adult dogs benefit the crater, not the crated.*

A good question to ask ourselves is: if dogs find [crates so relaxing and natural](#), and enjoy being locked up, why is there a glut of materials produced on how to trick, beg, bribe, coach, teach and encourage a dog to accept the crate? Most dogs beg, attempt to hide, and fight going into them. Others submit out of fear of what will happen to them if they don't comply. And, still, others freeze because, that too, is what fear can look like. Regardless of how you get the dog into the crate, once he experiences long hours of being trapped inside, there will be tension the next time he is asked to go back into it. Just the sight of the crate will be enough to induce panic in some dogs.

Crate training can take many months, a lot of howling and resistance, as well as destruction of items and beds. Dogs who are muscular and athletically inclined such as Huskies, Dobermans or Shepherds, Collies, and Retrievers, etc., suffer profoundly from being locked inside a crate.

escalates into desperate attempts imagine how many to communicate to to me," before we don't listen, the

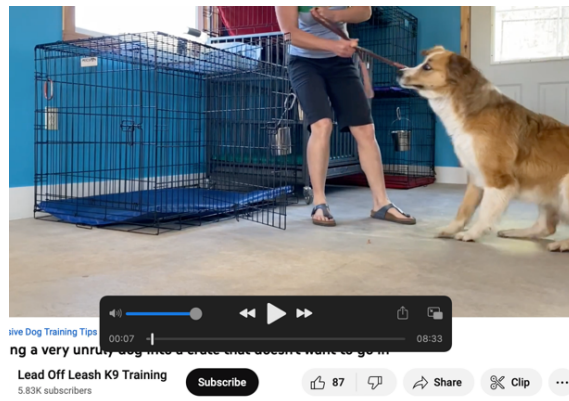


Chronic frustration soon aggression, and to escape. I can't ways an animal needs us, "Please don't do this start to listen. When we dogs lose trust in us.

When trust is eroded, emotional bonds break, and all kinds of behavioural issues can develop.

Here is a [YouTube video](#) titled, 'Getting a very unruly dog into a crate that doesn't want to go in'. The person in the video is a trainer by profession. This video demonstrates the unpleasant emotions that

many dogs suffer being ‘taught’ to love their crate. The trainer employs force, intimidation, a leash, a prong collar, a muzzle and treats to get the dog inside the crate. Sorry, no, I don’t think we can chalk this up to a rare occurrence. I believe this happens with [shocking regularity](#). Remember, this isn’t hidden video. This trainer proudly posted this as an instructional for the public at large to see.



*Screenshot from YouTube video titled, [‘Getting a very unruly dog into a crate that doesn’t want to go in’](#).*

The instructions people should be getting is if their dog resists, trembles, shakes, begs or struggles, to any degree, to being put in a crate, are to immediately stop, comfort and reassure your dog that it won’t happen again, and find an alternate babysitter.

We need to hear more from science about how routine long-term crating affects dogs. Current behavioural studies, and those on dog crating and kennelling, indicate that the potential is ripe for negative impact. It is clear from studies of wild animals in captivity that they suffer sustained stress, which causes a profound negative impairment of their physical and psychological states. Regardless of these findings, it would seem further studies are required to convince many people with dogs that social isolation, and lack of control over their environment, leaves their well-being in jeopardy.

What is particularly important is what dogs perceive as threatening; and, that needs to be avoided. Their nervous system comprises a brain with neural pathways modulating their feelings, thoughts and

emotions. In other words, they are sentient. In essence, their conscious experiences and emotions are [comparable to ours](#). We find confinement punishing. Drawing on these facts, we can extrapolate that dogs are not meant to be, and don't want to be, locked up. The collective evidence establishes this very clearly.

- The research of animals in kennels and captivity.
- fMRI scans showing dogs respond similarly to us.
- The typical behaviour of dogs resisting crates.
- The severe injuries they sustain trying to escape.
- Their anatomy has evolved to be mobile.

In defiance of this are people who champion the routine practice of crating as perfectly acceptable, and even indispensable. Pro-craters would prefer to avoid discussing the downside of crating altogether. When the subject is broached, they will often steer the conversation back to these fictional talking points, in defence of crating.

1. Crates keep animals relaxed, calm and safe.
2. They are essential to manage and house train puppies.
3. Dogs love being in crates because they are like dens.
4. Animals feel overwhelmed if given too much space.

The reality is, many dogs are injured while in crates. Puppies are a mere fraction of the animals being crated. Crates are nothing like [dens](#). And typically, dogs love running free in parks, on mountain trails and along miles of beach, so how is access to a whole house overwhelming? In fact, when animal experts say dogs deserve an enhanced quality of life, they recommend more freedom, movement and autonomy; less use of restrictive tools such as leashes, chains and crates. Furthermore, dogs can't do what they do best when they're confined. Besides being wonderful companions, they are great at alerting us to strangers, gas leaks, house fires, break-ins and other potentially disastrous events. If they remain chained up, or locked in crates, they won't be able to help us, or themselves. Any tool or

treatment can be justified when ethics, humaneness, feelings and emotions aren't taken into account. A report originating out of the UK during the '60s outlined a standard of animal care protocol described as the Five Freedoms. The Five Freedoms concept has been adopted by animal organizations around the world. It proposes that animals should have: freedom from hunger and thirst; freedom from discomfort; freedom from pain, injury or disease; freedom to express normal behaviour and freedom from fear and distress. To date, five additional domains have been added to the five freedoms to ensure further animal wellbeing. These are intended to promote good: nutrition, environment, health, behaviour and mental states. Dogs confined for extended periods in cramped cages would almost guarantee that at least one, if not all, of the five freedoms and five domains are ignored.

Let's step back, and identify the reasons people use crates:

- we live in a culture that promotes and encourages them.
- they are cheaper than sitters and daycare.
- to protect their other belongings.
- to punish.
- a new baby has joined the family.
- a dog is judged hyper, annoying and untrainable.
- the dog is deemed dangerous to the cat or the kids.
- the kids are deemed dangerous to the dog.
- no time for the dog.

All these reasons accommodate people, not dogs. Animals exhibiting behavioural problems require a credentialed behaviourist, not a crate. If we can't provide humane quality care for our pets, we shouldn't have them. The 'illusory truth effect' clearly applies to the misinformation repeated by those in the pet industry. By repeating the same misleading information, it becomes truth in people's minds. Just google crating dogs / dog crates. You will read and hear the same myths over and over again.



Pet experts with credible reputations in varying professions don't share the same opinions and attitudes. Their philosophy around how and when to use crates can be radically different from each other. People institutionally taught to advocate crating, tend to wholeheartedly promote its use. Indeed, it is one of the reasons crating is such a widespread phenomenon. When pet owners ask, 'How long is it acceptable to crate my dog every day?' it's not unusual for a pet specialist to respond that, 'eight-to-ten-hours for an adult dog is acceptable'. Eight to ten hours! *(Photo credit: Tulsa World)*



These guesstimates call to mind a time when corporal punishment was widely accepted in homes and schools, with limits, of course. Hitting a child was okay, as long as you hit with an open hand, and not with a closed fist. Using a belt or paddle was fine, as long as you didn't break the skin. Canada no longer allows children to be physically punished in schools. In most homes, it is considered an inappropriate way to discipline. I wonder how many millions of dogs



will be robbed of huge chunks of their short lives contained in boxes, before society says no more. In Finland and Sweden, crating in the home is unlawful. The law specifies how crates can, and cannot, be used. Crating a dog for eight to ten hours is considered inhumane and illegal. The absence of laws governing the use of crates in North America, ultimately gives the green light to any person in possession of an animal, to leave them caged, 24/7, if that's what they choose to do.

A Montreal DMV surgeon says it's not unusual to treat cats and dogs who have been physically [injured in cages](#); sometimes seriously

enough to require amputation. Dogs die in crates, and only a fraction of incidents and deaths are ever reported. Animals come into this world every minute, only to leave this world, with no one knowing they ever existed.

Some dig and scrape at the walls and door of their crates until their toenails bleed or are ripped out. Others are left with sprains, broken bones and dislocated joints. Too many cut their noses, paws, gums and break their teeth biting on the metal bars. These injuries don't occur because dogs are relaxing in their crates. The energy they expend to fight, howl, bark, tremble and cry for someone to liberate them is demanding on their bodies and psyches. When stress hormones surge, hearts race, blood pressure increases, breathing becomes more rapid, muscles become tenser and dogs become dehydrated and exhausted, and, when they finally realize flight/escape is not possible, exhausted dogs give up. Leaving a dog to 'work it out' until he collapses from exhaustion is not a dog that's been 'cured'. It doesn't mean they've learned to accept the crate. It means they've 'given up' trying to escape. It's a thing, and it's called 'learned helplessness'. This looks like passive acceptance. What it really is, is a descent into depression and hopelessness.

'There is none so blind as those who will not see'. Pretending that crating is for a dog's own good is disingenuous. The misery many dogs experience is plain to see, if we want to see it. While cruising a yard sale one sunny afternoon, a large dog crate caught my attention. I wandered over for a closer look, and what I saw instantly sickened me. The top part of the crate was laying upside down, with the inside surface showing. Etched into the sides and bottom of the crate were deep gouges -- gouges that would have taken many hours and intense muscle power to impress into the thick plastic. It's difficult to believe the dog responsible for the gouges didn't have damaged paws and nails. The struggling, crying and scratching that desperate dog did to free himself make me cringe. You don't need to be expert at interpreting canine behaviour to understand that trembling, crying,

whimpering and attempting to escape are all indicators of unease. These signs are universally understood.



*Claw markings made by a dog trying to free himself from his crate.*

The yard sale seller sauntered towards me, and I couldn't help myself. I pointed at the gouges and pronounced with suppressed disgust, "This is cruelty". Unexpectedly, he nodded and said, "I know." I continued, "This is evidencing this dog was desperate and suffering." He sheepishly said, "I know, I won't do that again." Then, he added that the dog had since passed away. I didn't trust myself to continue the conversation. I asked about the price and decided to purchase the crate. It didn't make sense because I had no use for it. But I bought it anyway. I didn't want the proof of that dog's misery to be lost and forgotten. That was over ten years ago, and I still have that crate in my backyard shed. It serves no purpose, other than to validate my belief that it is wrong to lock animals in boxes, and leave them there to suffer.

Dogs have minds of their own, and they respond to the commands of their owners because they value harmonious relationships. Dogs predominantly want to please. So, when our dogs strongly resist our commands, it likely means what we are requesting of them is highly threatening and disturbing. A significant number of dogs are genetically predisposed to being anxious, without the added pressures from us. The activities and environments we place them in can ease or exasperate their anxiety. It is beyond our ability to genetically alter

their physiological responses, or reprogram their neuronal circuits, to lessen that anxiety. What we can do, is stop putting them in crates. It's easier to destroy good health, than it is to restore it. Yet disturbingly, the crating industry's response to the fear dogs suffer when crated has produced such solutions as the 'high anxiety crate'. An escape proof box designed to outsmart dogs who suffer from separation anxiety and claustrophobia. The walls are welded and riveted for extra strength, and equipped with four steel locks to withstand the toughest escape attempts. Oh, and stackable too! This sadistic response to another being's fear and panic reveals the mentality behind the crating culture. I hope that seeing these products opens some eyes. Crating is not about caregiving. It's about power and control. It's about exploiting one's position over a helpless being for our own purposes. Even hinting that crating is for a dog's own comfort and safety is disingenuous.

Dogs feel itchy, sore, agitated, restless, hot, cold, stiff, crampy, and nauseated. When these less than pleasant states occur, a body aches for adjustment, a long stretch, a walk about, and a repositioning to a cooler, warmer or more comfortable place. But a body that's confined in a cramped space is not free to do any of those things. Being cramped all day hampers and strains muscles, necks and spines. This is the blueprint for back problems, torn ligaments, and, eventually, hefty vet bills.

The social isolation of being confined day after day is the epitome of being lonely and bored. Dogs deprived of companionship and enrichment will seek outlets for their energy, becoming destructive of their surroundings. They will chew on whatever they can get hold of, including themselves. Keeping your dog protected from trauma, chronic stress, fear and isolation is the ultimate path to achieving a well-balanced, happy dog. Crates are the antithesis to enrichment. We need to teach dogs to handle freedom, not to tolerate confinement.

A dog may appear from their upset from the crate. impacts of on an animal's behavior can and phobias. In PTSD. If a dog symptoms of anxiety or being locked up, these conditions soon develop afterwards.



to have bounced back once they're released. However, the negative prolonged confinement brain, body, and trigger life-long anxiety people, we call this doesn't show separation related claustrophobia before don't be surprised if

Separation anxiety or claustrophobia can't be 'cured' with training or punishment. In the case of separation anxiety, whoever is separated from the dog that causes the anxiety, or whatever unwanted outcome happens because of the separation, the abandonment and worry the dog experiences will not be easily resolved. This is a mental disturbance that becomes a physiological one as well. It will take time and therapy to treat these issues successfully. Crating is not a therapeutic strategy to deal with mental upset. It is a practical solution employed to restrain a dog from acting out in ways that cause damage to the house, his surroundings, or himself. It's a stop-gap solution without dealing with the underlying cause of the dog's anxiety. Yet, crating is recommended by some pet professionals as a way to resolve separation anxiety. Confining the dog to a crate only exasperates the condition, it doesn't relieve it. Ideally, you will want to avoid invoking further episodes of anxiety. To resolve the root cause of a mental disturbance and understand the emotions and behaviours behind it, commitment, therapy, empathy and patience are needed. A crate is nothing more than a canine strait-jacket.

While dogs find predictability reassuring, don't confuse this with being content to being locked up every day. How often have you heard

someone say, 'it's ok to crate adult dogs because, over time, they will learn to accept their crate?' Animals habituated to a life of confinement can become resigned to being imprisoned, and find freedom intimidating. When a perpetually crated dog is offered freedom, some are reluctant to grab it. I analogize a dog that's been habitually crated from an early age to a person serving a very long prison term. When it's time for release, they both experience heightened anxiety, not knowing what to expect on the other side. They find an empty, lonely existence less disturbing than freedom.

If you choose to quit crating your dog, the money spent on a crate need not go to waste. They make great end tables, perches for cats, storage for books, protection for outdoor equipment, and who knows what else?!



*Use crates to store items that don't breathe; books, equipment and who knows what else.*

In crating situations, it's not always the dog experiencing the anxiety. A co-worker became quite upset near the end of our shift one afternoon because we were told we would have to stay overtime for a meeting. She crates her dog. If she stayed the extra time, her dog would be crated ten plus hours, that day alone. She also crates him at night as well, so the stretch was essentially a lot longer. When she was telling me this, she revealed that the crate was big enough for her dog to stand in, but not big enough for him to turn around. She sheepishly confessed to having to force him into the crate each morning. She would arrive home each day to an exhausted, stressed out, and on occasion, bloody dog. The surprise to me was although she really loved her dog, she still did this to him every morning. She

was a first-time dog owner. She was told by the breeder she purchased the dog from to *always* crate the dog when she wasn't home. She rejected her own observations and common sense, because it wasn't her nature to question who she perceived as the expert. Likewise, she bought into the whole crating concept, and stuck to it for years, despite her dog's resistance. She did it because she thought it kept her dog safe. Shortly after our talk, she quit putting her dog in a crate. She left her dog in a room with water, toys and a bed. With relief, she reported that within days her dog's anxiety seemed to evaporate. He no longer exhibited anxious behaviour when she left the house, or the exhaustion when she came home. She seemed surprised there was no damage when she got home. Soon, he was given access to her whole place. I wonder how many people come home to a dog (minus the blood) quiet and exhausted, only to interpret this as calm and contented?

Are there times when crates can be used humanely? I would be a fool to say there weren't. We need crates. They are valuable tools when used appropriately with care and knowledge. Vets and rescues could not keep animals safe without them. Crates are invaluable for emergency evacuations, recovery from major surgeries and other short-term or extraordinary events. It is wise for every pet owner to familiarize their pets with different types of crates, for *mini* periods, with the door open and closed, to lessen their alarm, in case they are needed. Make the experience as positive as can be. Let them enjoy the crate as a place of their own, to snuggle up and sleep in, when they choose to, with the **door removed**. Don't mistake a dog's motivation to seek privacy and personal space as wanting to be locked up. Some will try and sell crates as the best way to accommodate a dog's need for quiet time. When dogs are free, they can find their own spaces. Quiet time is crucial for dogs. Crates are not. Your empathy and understanding of an animal's needs will guide you to recognize when a crate is necessary, or not.

The type of crate a person chooses, where it's placed, and how it's used, can make the dog. Setting a crate one on top of base. This happens poorly run rescues who suffer



experience better or worse for a above ground level or stacked, another, results in an unstable more often in overwhelmed and and hoarding situations. Dogs claustrophobia, and are forced inside a solid crate, must feel like they're being entombed.

Compounding this helplessness, is leave their dogs in unlit areas, or cover the crate with a blanket, dog in total darkness. Long hours of deprivation and isolation can lead to confusion. Imagine falling asleep in



when people completely cloaking the sensory mental complete

darkness, only to wake up to darkness. Not being able to turn the light on, to reset your compass and biological functions, it would be disorienting, to say the least. It is reported people who are confined, against their will, in dark environments for long periods of time, experience all kinds of bodily and mental disruptions, including hallucinations, due to lack of brain stimulation. Such an environment can cause a dog a long-term fear of the dark, whether in or out of a crate. Imprisoning people in a pitch-black environment is a form of torture. Of course, people don't intend to torture their dogs. Most people want the best for their pets and go out of their way to give them what they need. It is when we are unsure of how to do this, or given poor advice, that we unintentionally hurt them. Some dogs bounce back, seemingly showing no negative effects at all when crated. This can happen. But, although some dogs are super resilient, we can't dismiss the countless dogs who are not. If we can't agree that crating is torture for many dogs, at least we should be able to agree that it is the antithesis to providing dogs with enrichment and stimulation.



Quite different are wire crates. They leave an animal with vision on all sides, which is often preferable. However, the downside is, being visibly exposed on all sides can trigger feelings of vulnerability and insecurity. Dogs cannot relax or sleep when they are perpetually on guard. If noisy children or other animals are in the vicinity, this could cause agitation, particularly if they are left outside. Yes, people leave their dogs in crates outside, unattended, and in all kinds of weather.



*Hillsborough Animal Control officers found a [deceased dog inside a crate registering 131 degrees](#). Two other dogs were barking inside a 125-degree utility closet. Photo: ABC Action News*

Perhaps, you remember in 2007, when it was revealed an extremely wealthy, privileged, and highly educated man, strapped his dog crate to the roof rack of his car, stuffed his [Irish Setter inside](#), and went on a twelve-hour road trip. Some excused this cruelty, contending this happened way back in '83, when it was normal to treat animals like this. Yes, the needle has moved somewhat, but still, we're talking 1983, not 1883. If you think something like this couldn't happen in the 2020s, [think again](#).

Worse than the length of time people leave dogs in crates, is the size of the crate they leave them in. Too often, crates are too small for the size and weight of the dog. Think about it. If you had a crate that provided a large dog enough room to comfortably lay and stretch his legs, stand up and turn around, without touching the walls, it would take up a considerable amount of room -- room many people don't have, particularly condo dwellers. On the other hand, some trainers, breeders, and salesmen recommend people intentionally purchase a crate on the smaller size. They suggest the smaller size is best to 'train' (a euphemism for pressurize) a dog from eliminating in his crate. When a dog can't help but defecate in

his crate, this can lead to a poop eating habit; coprophagia. [Poop eating](#), when behaviour is triggered by one's environment and is not a medical issue, it can develop out of boredom, as a way to remove the offending mess from a place of rest, or to hide evidence when a dog has been punished for pooping in his crate.

There are enough animals driven 'crazy' in crates to refute the fiction that crates are vessels of protection and well-being. When we've been conditioned to think of something as acceptable, it is amazing how oblivious we can be to the signs that it is not. A local pet store, put together a designated area to display animals, available for adoption. The animals were brought in from a notable animal welfare organization. In one of the crates, was a large German Shepherd mix. He was whining, and pawing at the bars of the crate. It was obvious that he was in distress, and, as was apparent, the crate was too small for the size of his body. He couldn't stand erect without bending his head, and he couldn't turn around. When we complained to the store employee (it was near closing and the manager had gone home), I couldn't believe my ears when I was told that the dog wasn't panting from stress, the dog was smiling. The animals were visible to the customers, to store staff, and, of course, to whomever from the animal organization that put the Shepherd in the crate. Because the dog was being displayed for a worthy purpose, it seemed to cloud people's vision about the way this was being accomplished. It was obvious we weren't going to get any satisfactory results from the store employee as the store was closing. So, we left and called the animal welfare organization responsible. They promised to immediately take steps to have the dog removed from his predicament.

The effects of over crating can literally cripple dogs. While walking our dogs in a local park, we crossed paths with a man walking his German Shepherd. His dog was moving as if intoxicated. His hind end drooped, while his back legs struggled to hold up his body weight. He weaved awkwardly, as he staggered forward. Seeing our concern, the owner offered the explanation that his dog walked this way because his muscles had atrophied. The dog had been crated most of his life.

The man was the dog's new owner. On the one hand, it was sad to watch, but, on the other, you could tell the dog was really excited. He was free, at last, to wander and explore. He was enjoying simple pleasures that had been denied to him. This story gets better. Several months later, at the same park, the same dog 'RAN' up to our dogs. His gait was still odd, and his back end sloped, but his hind legs were behaving as they should. It was wonderful to see. The world can't know how many animals suffer this same fate, because it happens privately, and in secret.

How about the following story, did this man make the right choice? He was given a very sweet little pup, that had been abandoned. When he got home, his wife made it very clear, she did not want the dog. She said it would be nothing but a nuisance, and a burden. The only way it would be allowed to stay, is if it were kept out of sight, in a crate. This did not sit well with her husband. Crating was not an option he would consider, so, he decided to do what was best, and find her a good home. In his ad, he wrote, 'Looking for a new home, she's 51, non-smoker, cleans up well and is a good cook'. Ok, this didn't really happen. Well, least we don't think so. But, come on, you loved the ending, right? (*Meme creator unknown*)



In the '60s, a zoo in Canada received four polar bears, presented to them by the Hudson's Bay Company as gifts. Captive wild animals are often driven crazy, but with no choice, and unable to will themselves to death, they are forced to serve out a life sentence, in whatever wretched situation they are put in. The last surviving bear served almost forty years in a concrete compound. In the '90s, after a hundred plus years of exhibiting animals, and timed with the death of this last bear, the zoo closed. In his last years, the bear with his head hung low, paced. He took a few steps, lifted his paw, licked it, place it back down, then took a few more steps, lifted and licked his paw, and

repeated this over and over. No doubt, there were moments, at least in the bear's youth, when he looked playful and swam, and people would point and say how happy he looked. I know this article is supposed to be about dogs and crates, so why am I talking about bears in zoos? Practices that were once accepted and supported in the past, are no longer tolerated. Boundaries and awareness of what is humane and inhumane, have shifted; however, not nearly enough. We can hope that the habitual crating of dogs will also lose its widespread acceptance, along with so many barbaric practices and tools. Many people who think the same thing may refrain from saying it out loud. They know how hostile the blowback can be. Still, many more pet professionals are speaking out about the adverse side effects of over crating. If enough of us say this out loud, people will have to listen.

There are no stats on how many animals are crated at any given time. The practice has been entrenched in North America, since the beginning of time, despite the deep psychological damage possible. Most crating goes on behind closed doors. So, no doubt, the number is astronomical. It doesn't have to be this way. With gentle guidance and direction dogs can be given freedom and choice. Millions of dogs live freely in their own homes as part of the family. Yours can too.

I'm a firm believer that the stronger the bond between you and your pet, the less likely you would consider routine crating. People who prioritize the feelings and needs of their pets, over convenience and cost, have the best relationships, and the most contented pets. Both benefit. Domineering owners, who micromanage their dog's every move, are either unaware or don't care that they are neglecting their dog's emotional states. And, that's when behavioural problems arise. A pet's behaviour is often an extension of the owner's behaviour. Once we begin to do better, so do our pets.



What relaxed, safe, & free looks like.

It is important that a dog owner identifies and addresses their dog's stress as soon as it occurs. In the case of crate related stress, there are a number of alternative options to consider. The very least one can do is to crate much less and for shorter periods of time. A few days a week, at a well-run daycare centre, can help tremendously with a dog's social skills, exercise needs, and alleviating [boredom](#). Even dogs with free run of the house can benefit from a couple of days at a *well-run* daycare. Choosing a qualified in-home sitter can be as useful. A less expensive option is to have a friend come by and give a dog potty breaks and company. Exchange favour for favour. Have an at home neighbour or friend sit your dog during the week for cutting her grass on the weekend. Offer to do someone's shopping on your way home, in exchange for taking your dog on walks. If you are a dog owner and work at home, offer to sit for someone else's dog, thereby providing company and a playmate to both dogs.

Studies make it clear; air quality, living space, and time spent in natural environments all impact human health. Children raised in [environments](#) with a lack of exposure to outdoor green spaces risk a higher level of developing learning disabilities and psychiatric disorders. Dogs are equally impacted by their environments as well. Urban living takes its toll on all of us. Who couldn't use regular long hikes in the forest and strolls along the beach. Hiring a dog walker, to break up your dog's day with a quality walk, is an ideal way to provide the enrichment they need, and deserve. Do your homework first, and know who you are trusting with your dog.

We can take dogs with us on outings or leave them with our family members. Treks home during the day, to play, feed and walk our dogs can also work. When dogs are free inside the home, installing a doggie door to the backyard or patio is a wonderful way to turn tedious long periods alone into more interesting ones. It also gives them the opportunity to relieve themselves. If full freedom of the home is not an option, a full-size room outfitted with a bed, radio, TV, toys, fresh water and a window is a huge upgrade from being locked in a crate. As an aside, don't forget to give a good breakfast to your dog before you leave for a long day away. This can make a huge difference to their comfort.

The question we need to ask ourselves before we decide on a pet is, 'Am I ready to provide the necessary care for another being?' Many dogs end up in crates because their owners don't truly understand the huge demands of pet ownership. When we are unable to meet our obligations, this can bring out years of guilt and self-reproach. Who, among us, hasn't uttered the words, 'how could I not have known this before?' Talk to people who are happy with their dog(s), but, also, talk to people who aren't. Listening to the challenges of those who've decided to give up their dog(s), months, or even years later, can provide you with an invaluable perspective. It can prepare you for what is to come. The bottom line, crating dogs can have a profound effect on them, leading to relationship problems, mental and physical disease and a shortened life span. And it needn't be that way. My hope is you find value in this article and the resources attached. I hope it helps make you and your dog's lives better.

Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness isn't just for the two legged.



Safe

Free

Relaxed

The End

**Disclosure:** I'm not a pet expert and I don't wish to claim expertise I don't have. I am a person who has lived with dogs for several decades. I am a person who has experienced claustrophobia and knows what that feels like. Because I don't work in the pet industry, or am affiliated with any organizations, my words are not governed by any association's rules, or what's good for business. I have no fear of being ridiculed for anthropomorphizing as I am as comfortable attributing human commonalities to other species, as I am our differences. And, like many of you, I am confident I have the good sense to know when something is not right. I have a request for those in the pet industry. Please stop recommending crates as a cheap, convenient babysitter.

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