

ESCAPE-PROOF CRATES; IF IT SOUNDS CRUEL, IT'S BECAUSE IT IS.

Many of us have been taught to embrace the benefits that crating dogs provide us. It is why many animal caregivers avoid articles like this one. We don't want to question what has become customary and acceptable; we know instinctively, it's not. Crates for dogs are needed. However, the times that they are truly necessary account for a tiny fraction of how pervasive crates have become.

When we force our dogs into isolation for extended periods of time, the discomfort we are causing them is clear. They let us know. Their scratching and howling are emotional states that are difficult to misinterpret, even for first time pet owners. Dogs crying and clawing at the walls of the box they are forced into, sometimes remain locked in until their nails bleed and their teeth break (from trying to break out of the crate), and these are clear clinical signs that a dog is being tormented.

The multi billion dollar business of crates.

The countless pet dogs who hate their crates are at risk of further torment with what the crating industry has introduced as inescapable or escape-proof crates -- a crate designed for dogs with a history of panic behaviours when confined. The distress a dog experiences in a regular wire crate is amplified by the closed environment of the inescapable crates. There are numerous companies manufacturing these heavy-duty crates. One of these suffocating looking boxes is called the 'High Anxiety' crate. Anybody placed inside one of these couldn't help but feel entombed. During hot weather leaving any thick coated dog in such a crate can be life threatening.

Here is the sales pitch on the IMPACT website used to sell the 'High Anxiety' crate.

"Our renowned escape-proof dog crate is thoughtfully engineered to protect and outsmart pets who suffer from severe separation anxiety. The High Anxiety Crate's welded structure, four additional butterfly latches, and carefully designed ventilation holes, provide a safe den environment for dogs with destructive tendencies."

It can outsmart pets with separation anxiety! Well, that's a trick and half...except miracles don't occur in crates! The marketing ploy that their escape-proof crate 'outsmarts pets with severe anxiety' is just a clever tactic to drive more sales. The strategy here is name it, and they will believe it, except a name is just a name. As with many marketers of controversial products, they co-opt words, distort their meanings, and some even spin cruelty as kindness. They do whatever they think will make their products sound more appealing and sellable. Why would anyone bother with a veterinary behaviourist or anxiety specialist who has honed their skills for years to

competently and humanely rehabilitate anxious dogs, when all they have to do is put them in a vault like box?

A skeptical person would want to know how this magic works. The vocalizing and exertion a desperate dog expends in trying to escape an inescapable crate strains, drains, and exhausts them physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Eventually, hopelessness sets in and their spirit is crushed.

This despondent state is celebrated by some balanced and [punishment-based trainers](#) and even some pet owners as positive behavioural changes. They are thrilled with their demoralized dog because a dog dispirited is so much more manageable. Some people prefer a dispirited dog over an emotionally healthy one.

We have choices, they don't.

A testimonial and endorsement featured on the IMPACT website by a purchaser of a High Anxiety crate stated that they previously went through dozens of wire, plastic, and heavy duty crates in the eight years they've had their 60 pound dog. They wrote, "Even with medication she was an anxious beast". They further stated, "they bought the crate in March 2023. It's now November and aside from her absolutely massacring the interior paint job, the cage is holding strong". They expressed that they wished they had bought the crate eight years ago. The picture accompanying the text showed large portions of the surface paint on the inside of the door being clawed off. Claw marks are etched into the remaining paint, revealing the anguish this dog endured. It is a haunting endorsement that is extremely difficult to get out of one's mind. It definitely tells a story, but an extremely heartbreaking one.

A leading scholar in animal ethics, [Dr. Jessica Pierce](#) notes, in her opinion, "*The IMPACT crate is an inhumane and cruel tool for confining dogs. I would urge people not to use this product or others like it and particularly not if they have an anxious dog. These crates have the potential to inflict serious and lasting psychological harm on our canine companions. We should see this product for what it is: a torture chamber. No dog should ever be subjected to one.*"

Individuals who experience anxiety and phobias describe their symptoms as a sudden onset of panic and feelings of being out of control, experiencing fear, and suffocating feelings as well as experiencing muscle tension, breathlessness, trembling, sweating, confusion, and a desperate need to escape. Science has reported through brain imaging [studies](#) that people and dogs share similar emotions in similar situations. It's difficult to imagine a dog locked in a box having to endure such symptoms indefinitely and repeatedly. It is a biological imperative for all animals, including us, to feel free.

Not all dogs are upset and distressed in a crate because they have been separated from their owners. Many dogs are fearful and frustrated in general, and confinement heightens the intensity of these emotions. Some dogs have medical issues which make restricted movement painful such as back pain, poor circulation, muscle spasms, osteoarthritis, or other afflictions that leave them in discomfort. Regardless of the

reason an animal hates being confined, to deliberately keep them that way, disparages their sentience. Crates do not provide safety and protection, we do.

Millions of dogs that are routinely crated against their will learn that it is only a matter of time before they will be crated again. The worry and fear of this leaves many dogs chronically anxious. Fear changes the brain, and this leaves a dog suffering in or out of the crate. When people experience [multiple traumatic events](#) the risk for developing severe stress disorders increases. Dogs that are repeatedly traumatized will also develop severe and chronic stress.

Who will rescue the rescued?

Recently, a number of rescues, foster homes, and sanctuaries have been showing up on Facebook pages pleading for free escape-proof crates or the funds to buy them.

They claim that they need them for the homeless dogs they've 'rescued'. Dogs who came to them already suffering from stress, anxiety, and trauma. A dog's feelings and emotions are not without reason. Despite what some people think, they are not playing you, and they are not cry babies, drama queens, spoiled, or attention seekers. They are upset, frightened, and stressed. These emotional states are not voluntary, they are reflexive. It is state of mind.

When these dogs show their rescuers that they hate being crated, the rescuers don't remove the crate and address the reasons behind the dog's behaviour, which competent and caring people would do. Instead, they search out escape-proof crates which can [re-traumatize](#) the dogs over and over again. Imagine rescuers thinking it's a rational solution to treat anxiety by causing more anxiety. It's the many well run rescues and shelters that end up taking on the heart breaking messes [inept rescues](#) leave behind. Since anyone can call themselves a rescue, the existence of inferior rescues is widespread, uncontrolled, and unchecked.

If you choose a dog you can handle, you won't have to break him.

Most people have heard the term 'breaking' in reference to wild horses. It's used in traditional horse training and means to crush the free spirit and wildness out of a horse. Although currently more gentle techniques are promoted in the horse world, there are still plenty of old school 'cowboy' techniques being used today that use force, dominance, and pain in training. Once broken, the horse lives under the domination of humans. So, what does this have to do with dogs? Crating can be seen as a breaking method for dogs. The end results of repeated force crating can be comparable to the end results of horse breaking. Dogs become beaten down and their spirits are crushed. They lose their exuberance for life and become more biddable.

The many pet owners who crate their dogs are persuaded to use crates by people working in pet related industries parroting all kinds of 'nearly facts,' 'half truths', and outright myths that they often believe themselves. These people don't hesitate to

recommended crates as babysitters, furniture protectors, behaviour modifiers, and a great way to turn annoying dogs into relaxed dogs.

Have you been told that dogs love their crates because they are like a den and they feel protected and safe? Have you been made to feel like a failure because your dog has no manners? Have you been advised to [turn a deaf ear](#) to your dog's cries for help? Those who have a stake in us buying these narratives will likely protest this article but their opposition will be self-serving and weak. Frightened, unhappy, and anxious dogs, who are crying out for attention, require attention. Dogs suffering separation anxiety and claustrophobia need to be supported and loved, not locked in boxes.

Most people are capable of providing their dogs with a safe, spacious, and comfortable environment with natural lighting and a cozy place to sleep, room to move around in, stretch, drink, play with toys, and listen to music. Our dogs didn't choose us, we chose them. It is why we owe them the best life we can give them.

If you wouldn't do it to a child, don't do it to your dog.

[Studies](#) show that there is a striking similarity between the neural circuitry and functioning of the brain in dogs and humans. If we needed to alleviate a child's fear, anxiety, or frustration, one would be hard pressed to find a psychologist who would recommend calling our child crazy, suggesting we ignore their feelings, punish them or put them in circumstances that worsens their distress. But we don't think twice about doing any of these things to our dogs.

In a craigslist ad written by a German Shepherd owner selling his escape-proof crate, he writes, "The crate is still indestructible except for the scratches inside because, "The crazy dog kept 'trying' to get out." Another ad posted by a man selling his High Anxiety crate described his Husky's behavioural changes after routinely crating him for years as now "nicely low key". When questioned what that meant, he got defensive and wouldn't answer. We can pretend we don't know what we are doing but that eventually comes back to haunt us. Because Huskies and German Shepherds can be strong minded, high spirited, crave mental stimulation, independence, autonomy, and freedom, they can suffer deeply when confined.

While walking with a bunch of dog owners, one man revealed he crated his dog even though his dog hated it. When he was asked why he kept crating him, he said, 'his dog deserved it for all the shit he put him through'. This guy wasn't evil. He just wasn't ready to live with dogs and let them be dogs. Some people shouldn't have a dog. Sadly, anyone can buy a dog, a shock collar and a crate; the perfect recipe for misery.

Who comes up with this stuff?

What mindset builds inescapable crates for dogs that are phobic, anxious, and fearful and call it humane and safe? People skilled at engineering heavy duty containers. People motivated to solve a mechanical problem. Not people who are concerned with

animal welfare. Some folks still don't view animals as [conscious beings](#) that are capable of suffering. Escape-proof crates are not for the benefit of the dog, as so many companies claim. They exist to assuage a crater's frustration by putting the frustration on the dog.

[Dr. Jessica Pierce](#), bioethicist and [author](#) of 'Who's a Good Dog? And How to Be a Better Human' further states, *"The marketing and sale of so-called anxiety crates -- specially designed for dogs that experience anxiety when confined to a cage -- is deeply troubling. If a dog is so distressed by being locked in a crate that they try to dig or chew their way out, the humane response is certainly not to lock them in an even more tightly constraining and anxiety-provoking crate. Rather, a compassionate response to crate anxiety involves not putting the dog in a cage at all, period."*

Enough already!

Lets quit willfully, turning a blind eye to what's around us, and even within our own families: dogs being tormented in crates. [Research](#) has determined that the more overt signs of stress are understood by dog owners. So, what are we thinking when our dogs are frantically trying to get out of their crate, yet we leave them there? We expect dogs to be chameleons and change to whatever environment we put them in. We must take greater responsibility for our dog's emotional states.

When stress signs are more subtle, pet owners can miss or misinterpret them. This could account for why some people say their dogs don't mind the crates. They may resist a little going in, but, once inside, they seem calm and quiet. Soft, stoic dogs don't react in overt ways. Instead, they make themselves look smaller to avoid attention, being bullied, or punished. They remain still and tense, tails tucked in, and ears pinned back. They may tremble, pant, and drool but even if we notice these signs, some of us have been taught to ignore them.

Don't underestimate your dog's intelligence and capabilities, nor the hurdles they have to overcome to live with us. We don't need to hurt them, lock them up, or shock them to teach them. Dogs learn with patience, gentle touches, and soft voices. They thrive with kind treatment and harmony. I don't know of any animal, including us, that doesn't. It is imperative a dog's internal and external needs be fulfilled by allowing them to engage in what they innately feel is enjoyable, normal, and instinctive.

A dog's life is too short to spend any of it locked in a box.

Legislation to ban crates, or at least restrict how they are used, is imperative. Self-delusion, sugar coating, and full outright denial are all ways we permit ourselves to 'force crate' when we know, deep down inside, it is not normal, natural, or kind.

It doesn't matter if you've used a crate, still use a crate, or have been promoting them. If you're having a "What was I thinking" moment, join the club. We've all been there. Change comes when we change. And who better to lead the way than real dog lovers

who've been down the crating path and now understand that there are far more effective and humane ways to care for them. Pet professionals who

have recommended crates are now realizing they have become a [real welfare concern](#), so they have started to recommend healthier alternatives. If you need help, there are veterinary behaviourists and credentialed trainers who use methods that are safe, ethical, and kind. If billions of dog owners can keep their pets protected, happy and healthy without crates, so can you.

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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 many decades. I also know what claustrophobia feels like. I wrote this for dogs because I believe they are all beautiful souls and I owe them for a lifetime of fun, happiness and loyal companionship.

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