

The CRATING CRAZE:

Its impact on well-being.

by G. Williams

“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, it's a bold statement, considering we have bits, spurs, whips, chains, prods, shock, prong, and choke collars. However, it's the widespread and exhaustive use of crates/cages/boxes that qualifies them to be top of the list.

There's nothing healthy, enriching, or pleasant about being put in a cage and left there. Animals who are crated for long periods of time become lonely, sad, and aching to be free. Pet owners need to hear what crate enthusiasts aren't interested in talking about. The evidence and research, not to mention the protest of our whimpering and crying dogs, are telling us to stop. No species is biologically designed to be warehoused in containers. Containers are best suited for storing items that don't breathe.



Cages, stalls and crates
prevent animals from engaging in normal healthy behaviours.

The dog crate market is a growth industry generating billions of dollars and North America is the region experiencing the highest sales boom. 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 end up living in a world of hurt.

Behind Closed Doors

The movement to restrict or ban the chaining of dogs, in both Canada and the USA, has been a forceful movement, with good reason. People chain and isolate millions of dogs outdoors, in back yards and carports, out of sight and out of mind. Animal advocates deem this inhumane, and are campaigning across North America to have chaining criminalized. Yet, a similar isolated existence for dogs, crated inside the home, hidden behind closed doors, has yet to raise any similar ire, or legal scrutiny. People ubiquitously hype the benefits of crating, while downplaying or ignoring the harm. Ironically, some who denounce the habitual chaining of dogs outside, will habitually crate them inside. This signals how indoctrinated we are into believing crating is an acceptable thing to do. It's time to revisit this. If we can defend imposing on our dogs severe stress and isolation, for our own self-serving interests, what else are we rationalizing? 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.



Photo Credit: FAIRHORSEMANSHIP

Whether to crate, has created controversy in many circles, 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, boarding kennels, sporting venues, dog shows, veterinary 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 (Lambe, 2022) to report finding animals confined to crates, injured and in various states of emaciation, covered in their own feces, and clinging to life. Locking billions of animals in crates/ cages causes irreparable harm to their physical and mental well-being. For this article, we will talk about the species most of us share our homes with, dogs, and the metal and plastic crates we use to confine them.

The Big Delusion; Dogs Love Their Crates

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 dog's emotional upset is dismissed or downplayed. The harm that comes from this is significant. It's the popular delusion that crates help dogs feel content, relaxed, and safe that reinforces the permission to force a dog into one. It is foolishness that dogs, as descendants of wolves, love their crates because they are like dens. (Mech DL 2008) A dog doesn't know he loves the crate, until you train him, is marketing spin. The reality is, dogs are not den animals and being locked in boxes is not pleasant, it's scary and frustrating. Let's stop distorting reality so we can pretend we are not being cruel. If you can't share your life with a dog without regularly crating him, for hours on end, don't get a dog. If you tally up the time your dog spends alone, with or without access to the entire house, this should tell you whether your lifestyle is conducive to pet ownership. Sadly, unregulated breeding causes a never-ending stream of dogs entering the world, leaving rescues overflowing and with the impossible task of finding *good* homes for all of them. To this end, they will attempt to persuade anyone and everyone to get a dog.

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 wolves' den is nonsense. 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 and

secure. A crate is unnecessary. The comparison between a den and a crate is a false equivalency. But the myth lives on. It's human nature not to question, too closely, what benefits us, and we wish to be true.

Dogs Can Teach Us a Thing or Two



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.



Crating adult dogs benefits the crater, not the crated.

It's Useful to Question What We Think We Know.

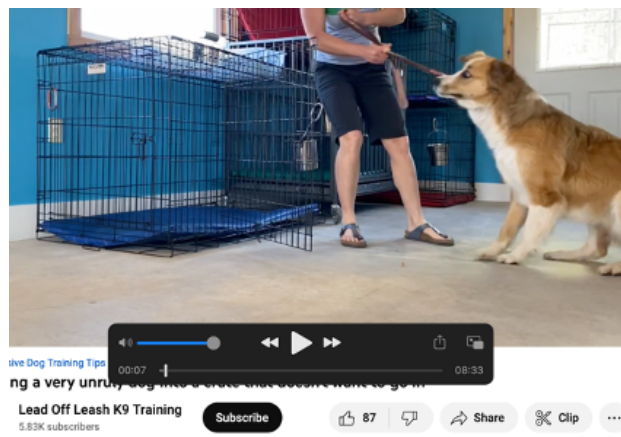
If you've been convinced that a crate is a safe and relaxing place to leave your dog when not at home, you're not alone. It's a narrative many hear, believe and welcome because it's such an easy fix for so many things. We are very adept at seeing what we want to see. I know it's not typically recommended to make people feel guilty if you want to bring them on to your side. But, as long as we keep turning a blind eye, our dogs will continue to suffer. The second a crate door is closed against an animal's will, it can become a recipe for long-term anxiety and the seed for neurotic behaviours.

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? When dogs are told to go into a crate many beg, attempt to hide, fight, and howl in protest, to avoid going inside. 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 a person gets the dog into a crate, once he experiences long hours of being trapped inside, there will be stress and tension the next time he is told 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 resistance, as well as destruction of items and beds. Dogs who are muscular and athletically inclined such as Huskies, Dobermans or German Shepherds, Collies, and Retrievers, suffer profoundly when locked inside a crate. Chronic frustration soon escalates into aggression, and their desperate attempts to escape. I can't imagine how many ways an animal needs to communicate to us, "Please don't do this to me," before we start to listen. When we don't listen, the 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 shows the unpleasant emotions that many dogs suffer being 'taught' to love their crate. The trainer employs force, pain, intimidation, a leash, a prong collar, a muzzle and treats to get the dog inside the crate. She is unmoved by the dog's stress panting, yelps and struggling. Sorry, no, I don't think we can chalk this up to a rare occurrence. I believe these tactics are used with shocking regularity by aversive trainers and misguided owners. Keep in mind, this video wasn't hidden. This trainer proudly posted this as an instructional video for the public.



*Screenshot from YouTube video titled,
'Getting a very unruly dog into a crate that doesn't want to go in'.*

The instruction people should receive is to immediately stop, comfort, and reassure a dog if he resists, trembles, shakes, begs, or struggles, to any degree, when being put in a crate, and to find an alternate babysitter.

How Much Evidence Does One Need?

We need to hear more from science about how habitual 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 profound stress, long term or permanent negative impairment of their physiology and psychological states. Despite an institution's wishful thinking they can mitigate captivity stress to improve a species immune and reproductive systems, some species will never adjust to captivity (Fischer, Romero, 2019). It would seem further studies are required to fully emphasize to people that dogs who are held captive, socially isolated, and lack control over their environment, are in dire jeopardy. Let them out!

What is important is what dogs perceive as threatening 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 (Berns, 2023). We find confinement punishing and stressful, and so do our pets. Neuroscientists tell us chronic stress kills neurons and shrinks our brains. Drawing on these facts, we can extrapolate that dogs are not meant to be, don't want to be, and should not be, locked up. The collective evidence establishes this clearly.

- The research of animals in kennels and captivity.
- fMRI scans showing dogs respond similarly to us.
- The widespread behaviour of dogs resisting going into crates.
- The severe injuries they sustain trying to escape a crate.
- Their anatomy has evolved to be mobile. Movement is liberty.

In defiance of these facts, people still defend the routine practice of crating as perfectly acceptable, and even indispensable. Pro-craters 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 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.
5. They are an excellent remedy for separation anxiety.

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 an entire house overwhelming? Mental health issues are not resolved by anyone being imprisoned.

When animal experts say dogs deserve an enhanced quality of life, they mean more freedom, movement and autonomy; less use of restrictive tools such as leashes, chains, and crates (Bekoff, 2019). 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, 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 considered.

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. (Elischer, 2019) These are intended to promote good: nutrition, environment, health, behaviour and mental states. Dogs confined for extended periods in cramped cages 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 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. And no, eight plus hours crated daily is not acceptable. The 'illusory truth effect' clearly applies to the misinformation repeated by some 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 unhealthy advice, that the well being of dogs is enhanced by crating them.

Experts Make Mistakes Too

Experts with credible reputations in varying pet 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 reason 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' and, in some cases, that's after they've been crated during the night. Eight to ten hours!

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



(Photo credit: Tulsa World)

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 stuck in boxes, before society says no more. In Finland and Sweden, crating in the home is unlawful. There are guidelines for the size of the space a dog is confined to, even when confined in a space that is not a crate. Crating a dog for eight to ten hours is considered inhumane and is illegal. The absence of laws and humane policies 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.

Safe & Humane, really?

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 (CBC News, 2013). 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, often with no one caring they ever existed.



Bobos Man, Youtube, 2021

Some dig and scrape at the walls and door of their crates until their toenails bleed or are ripped out. Others suffer 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 rapid, muscles tense, dogs become dehydrated, and eventually exhaustion sets in. They finally realize flight/escape isn't possible and 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. They've 'given up' trying to escape, and it's called 'learned helplessness'. (Seligman, Maier, Geer, 1968) This may look 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 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 likely did to free himself made me cringe. You don't need to be expert at interpreting canine behaviour to understand that trembling, crying, whimpering and attempts to escape are indicators of deep distress. Such overt signs of stress are universally understood (Mariti et al., 2012).



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 evidence 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 made little 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.

Forced Crating is About Power & Control

Dogs have minds of their own, and they respond to the commands of their owners because they value harmonious relationships. Dogs want peace. 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 fearful and anxious, (Tiira, Sulkama, Lohi, 2016) 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. Yet disturbingly, the crating industry's response to the fear dogs experience 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



A 'High Anxiety' Crate

own purposes. Even hinting that crating is for a dog's own comfort and safety is disingenuous.

The world's first dog psychologist, [Anders Hallgren, Psychologist, MSc](http://www.andershallgren.se), writes:

"To force a dog to stay in a crate where no protests and attempt to get out pays off will lead to a tragic state of so called "learned helplessness," something that was discovered by the American psychologist Martin Seligman. The suffering is equal to that of a human's, since dogs also have a well-developed nervous system. Learned helplessness is very much like depression and comes with a lot of physical and emotional symptoms of stress, or PTSD.

Because a cage such as the "High Anxiety crate" will speed up the process of learned helplessness, it is equal to animal cruelty and therefore it should be banned by law. All sales should be stopped immediately." - Anders Hallgren, Animal Behaviorist, Psychologist, MSc - www.andershallgren.se (personal communication, 2024)

Dogs Need Support, Not Crates

Dogs feel itchy, sore, agitated, restless, hot, cold, stiff, and nauseated. When these states occur, a body aches for change, a walk about, and a repositioning to a cooler, warmer or more comfortable place. But a body confined is not free to do any of those things. "Back Problems in Dogs" is a research report that found back problems in dogs are as common as they are in humans. (Hallgren, 2016) There is a strong correlation between injury, pain and problem behaviours. Since many people claim they crate their dog because of behaviour issues, it is tragic if the unwanted behaviour is due to pain.



Social isolation for dogs is the epitome of being

lonely and bored. The damage caused by isolation runs deep. (Beerda et al., 1999) Boredom is psychologically painful and as devastating as physical pain. Our emotions and feelings are at the root of who we are. Dogs were biologically made to socialize, live with others, explore and run free. It is why crating is often torture for them. Boredom is a state taken far too lightly by dog owners who rarely perceive how aversive it is to dogs. Similar to chronic stress, inescapable boredom causes neuronal and cognitive harm and is a serious welfare issue (Burn, 2017). Some handle isolation better than others, but all animals who are confined suffer losses.



Photo credit: Irina Zhur

Those who are deprived of companionship and enrichment will seek outlets for their energy. They will chew on whatever they can get hold of, including themselves. Dogs protected from chronic stress, fear and anxiety are well-balanced, happy dogs. To enhance the mental wellbeing of dogs, we need to teach them to handle freedom, not to tolerate confinement.

A dog may appear to have bounced back from their upset once they're released from the crate. It's more likely their prolonged confinement will develop into lifelong anxiety and phobias. In people, we call this post traumatic stress disorder, PTSD. If a dog doesn't show symptoms of separation related anxiety or claustrophobia before being locked up, don't be surprised if these conditions soon develop afterwards.

Separation anxiety or claustrophobia is not 'cured' with training, crating or punishment. These are clap-trap solutions without dealing with the underlying cause of the dog's anxiety. In the case of separation anxiety, whomever is separated from the dog that causes the dog anxiety and feelings of abandonment will be difficult to treat. It is important to avoid invoking further episodes of anxiety to prevent the episodes from escalating. It will take a deep commitment, therapy, empathy and patience. A crate is nothing more than a canine straitjacket.

While dogs find predictability reassuring, don't confuse this with being contented with 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 and love their crate?" Animals habituated to a life of confinement can become resigned to being imprisoned. When a perpetually crated dog is offered freedom, some are reluctant to grab it. I analogize a dog that has been habitually crated from an early age to a person serving a 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 crate need not go to waste. They make great end tables, perches for cats, storage for books and protection for outdoor equipment. The only limit is your imagination.

Good Owner; Bad Advice

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. 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, so the stretch was essentially a lot longer. When she was telling me this, she revealed the crate was big enough for her dog to stand up in, but not big enough for him to turn around. Furthermore, 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 occasionally, 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. Sadly, 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. 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 some of their animals safe, in certain situations, without them. Crates are invaluable for some emergency evacuations, recovery from major surgeries and other short-term or extraordinary events. Even in some of these situations, however, there are alternatives to crates.



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, in case one day they must be crated. 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 to 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, and when it is not.

The type of crate a person chooses, where it's placed, and the frequency it's used, can make the experience better or worse for a dog. Setting a crate above ground level or stacked, one on top of another, results in an unstable base. This happens more often in overwhelmed and poorly run rescues and hoarding situations. Dogs who suffer claustrophobia and are forced inside a solid crate must feel like they're being entombed. Compounding this helplessness is when



people leave their dogs in unlit areas, or completely cover the crate with a blanket, cloaking the dog in total darkness. Long hours of sensory deprivation can lead to circadian rhythm disruption causing mental confusion, depression, and neural death (González, MMC, 2018). Imagine falling asleep in 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. Reports show that individuals who are confined in dark environments for long periods of time, experience all kinds of physical and mental disruptions, including hallucinations, due to lack of brain stimulation. Such an environment can cause long-term fear of the dark (Nall, Medical News Today, 2020). Imprisoning people in a pitch-black environment is another recognized form of torture.

Of course, people don't intend to torture their dogs by leaving them in the dark. Most people go out of their way to give their dogs what they need. It is when we are unsure of how to do this, or given poor advice, that we hurt them. Although some dogs have the skills and personality to cope with being crated, we can't dismiss the countless dogs who do not. If we can't agree that crating is torture, 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 that being trapped and visibly exposed 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 Tampa Animal Control officers found, in the direct sun, a deceased male dog inside a crate registering 131 degrees. Two other dogs were barking inside a 125-degree utility closet. Photo: ABC Action News.

Perhaps, you'll remember in 2007 when an extremely wealthy, privileged, and highly educated man strapped a crate to the roof rack of his car and stuffed his [Irish Setter inside](#) (ABC news, 2007), then headed out 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, even so, we're talking 1983, not 1883. If you think something like this couldn't happen in the 2020s, think again. (Thom, Global News, 2021)

Distorted Thinking & Rationalizations Abound

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 (Pierce, 2022). Think about it. If you had a crate that provided a large dog enough room to lay comfortably 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. Dogs may develop a poop eating habit, triggered by their environment, not because of a medical issue. This habit can develop out of boredom, or to hide evidence when a dog is punished for defecating in their crate (Brister, 2018)

The fiction that crates are vessels of protection and well-being, can cure anxiety and bad behaviours, is refuted by the number of species exhibiting repetitive behaviours indicating compromised welfare and chronic stress (Denham, Bradshaw, Rooney, 2014). Dogs can be driven [crazy in crates](#). Yet, when we've been propagandized to think of crates as fitting and acceptable, it is amazing how oblivious we can be to the signs they are not.

Here is an example of a dog crated inappropriately in plain sight and no one seemed to notice. 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. Jammed into one crate 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 also obvious, 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 alerted a 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 dogs up for adoption were visible to the customers, the store staff, and, of course, to whomever from the animal organization who place them in the crates. Because the dog was being displayed for what people perceived as a worthy purpose, it must have clouded their thinking about how this was being accomplished. The employee claimed no one else complained. It was obvious we weren't going to get any satisfactory results from the store employee, and the store was closing. So, we left and called the animal welfare organization responsible. They promised to take immediate steps to have the dog removed from his predicament.

Crates can literally cripple dogs. In a local park while walking our dogs, we crossed paths with a man walking his German Shepherd. His dog moved as if intoxicated. His hind drooped, while his back legs struggled to hold his body weight. He weaved awkwardly as he staggered forward. Seeing our concern, the owner of the dog offered the explanation that the dog walked awkwardly because his muscles were atrophied. The dog had been crated most of his life. The man walking the dog was the 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 the simple pleasures that had been denied 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, but his back end sloped less and his hind legs were behaving as they should. It was wonderful to see. The world can't know how many more animals are being crippled, because they are hidden and locked away out of sight.

Clear Thinking

Did this man make the right decision? He was given a very sweet little pup that had been abandoned. When he arrived home with the pup, his wife made it very clear she didn't want the dog. She said it would be nothing but a nuisance and a burden. The only way it could stay is if it were to be kept out of sight and crated. This did not sit well with her husband. Crating was not an option he was ready to consider. So he did what he thought was best, and decided to 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 an excellent cook'. Ok, this didn't really happen. Well, at least we don't think it did. But, come on, you loved the ending, right?

Too Late For Some

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 since they have no choice, cannot will themselves to die, they are forced to serve out a life sentence, in whatever wretched environment they find themselves. The last surviving bear served almost forty years in a barren concrete compound. After a hundred plus years of exhibiting animals, and timed with the death of this last bear, the zoo finally closed in the '90s.

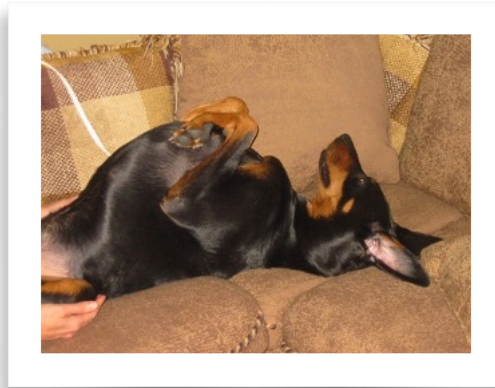
In his last years, the bear, with his head hung low, paced. He took a few steps, lifted and licked his paw, placed it back down, then took a few more steps, and did the same thing, over again and again. It was like he was in a trance and oblivious to anything else. No doubt, there were moments, at least in the bear's youth, when he looked engaged and playful 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



Meme creator unknown

tolerated. Boundaries and awareness of what is humane and inhumane have shifted; however, not nearly enough. Zoos still exist all over the world. We can hope that the habitual crating of dogs will soon lose its widespread acceptance, along with so many other barbaric practices and tools. Some people who agree with these thoughts, will refrain from saying them out loud. They know how hostile the blowback can be. Still, many more pet professionals are speaking out about the adverse 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. There are no records of how many animals have died in crates. No doubt, the number is astronomical. It doesn't have to be this way. With gentle guidance dogs can be given freedom and choice. Millions of dogs live freely in their own homes as part of the family. Yours can too.



What relaxed & safe looks like.

I'm a firm believer that the stronger the bond between you and your pet, the less likely you would be to crate. People who prioritize the feelings and needs of their pets, over convenience and cost, have the best relationships and the most contented pets. Owners who micromanage their dog's every move are 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 do better, so do our pets.

Not Too Late For Others

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 crate 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 your dog potty breaks and company. Exchange favour for favour. Have a neighbour or friend sit with your dog during the week in exchange for cutting their 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 someone else's dog, providing company and a playmate for your own dog.

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 (Engemann et al., 2019) (Yuchi et al., 2022). Dogs are equally affected by their environments. Urban living takes its toll on all of us. Who couldn't benefit from 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.

Visits home during the day to play, feed, and walk our dogs 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, and the added 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, music, a window is a huge upgrade from being locked in a box. Don't forget a nutritious breakfast before you go.

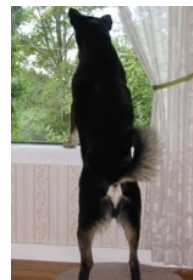
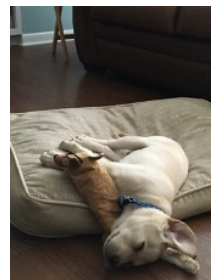
For those thinking of adopting a dog the question to ask yourselves is, ‘Am I ready to provide the necessary care for another being?’ Many dogs end up in crates because their owners don’t fully understand the immense demands of pet ownership. Talk to people who are happy with their dog(s), but, also, 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.

When we are unable to meet our obligations, this can bring years of guilt and self-reproach. Who, among us, hasn’t uttered the words, “How could I not have known this before?” or “What was I thinking?” In the scheme of things, it’s not important what other people may think of us, it’s how we feel about ourselves that matters. Don’t waste time on guilt. Just do better for your dog(s) while you can. My hope is you find value in this article and the resources attached.

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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 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 an association’s protocols or rules. I have no fear of being ridiculed for anthropomorphizing as I am as comfortable attributing human commonalities to other species, as much 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 who promote and recommend crates as convenient babysitters, please stop.*

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



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