**Crate Training Games**

**Game #1 The Magical Crate of Treats and Toys!**

This is an easy first exercise. When your dog isn’t in the room place a few treats in their crate, this could be replaced by a favorite toy, peanut butter kong, etc. Let your dog discover the treat on their own. They will learn the crate isn’t scary, it’s the bearer of delicious fun! Leave the door open the first few times you do this. If your dog seems happy and secure in the crate close the door for a few seconds, while he is happily munching, then open to allow him to exit.

**Game #2 The Treat Toss Game**

Once your dog is entering the crate on his own you can move on to more interactive games. Get a large amount of small treats ready and begin by tossing one into the crate. Let your dog enter on its own, do not coax or force the dog into the crate. Once the dog enters immediately praise them, after they eat their treat call them back to you and then throw another treat into the crate so they will re-enter. Repeat this process for 5-10 minutes. Remember to stay positive and pay attention to your dog, if they are getting bored with the game be sure to give them a break, you can always play again later.

**Game #3 Closing the Door**

After your dog is comfortable retrieving treats in the crate it’s time to add to Game #2 by closing the door for short periods of time. Start by tossing a treat in. ‘Fido’ will enter to retrieve the treat, now close the door for 2-3 seconds. The goal here is for your dog to stay quiet and calm, we don’t want to close the door for too long or they may bark, whine or scratch at the door. If they do any of these things and we open the door we are reinforcing bad behavior. “If I just whine a bit, they open the crate door…” So keep it brief and slowly add a few more seconds to each training session.

**Game #4 Meal Time in the Den**

This is an incredibly easy exercise that I have used for all of my foster dogs. Simply feed your dog their meals in the crate. I start with the door open but usually after a few days you’ll notice the dog is so excited about dinner time that they won’t even notice if you close the door. If you do close the door be sure to stand by and open it before they finish their meal so they can exit freely.

**Game #5 No Bolting, Please!**

We want our dog to exit their crate gracefully and calmly. Once a dog is comfortable being crated, with the door closed, you can teach them to exit calmly. The easiest method I’ve found is simply closing the door when your dog tries to bolt. Toss a treat into the crate. When your dog enters, close the door. Now open the door. If your dog stays put then praise them and give them a treat. If they begin to move forward, close the door. Wait until ‘Fido’ has settled down again and open the door a few inches. If he moves forward, close it. If he stays put open it a bit wider, and wider, until you can give him a treat. Then call him out of the crate, or better yet assign a release word such as “ok” “release” “break” or any other word that you use for releasing your dog from other commands such as sit and stay. If you are unfamiliar with release words then give it a Google! Release words make training much easier! Repeat this exercise for 5-10 minutes at a time. It won’t take long for him to realize that bolting out the crate isn’t ok.

**Game #6 This is Your Safe, Relaxing Place**

Once your dog is comfortable entering the crate, and when you close the door for a few minutes at a time, you can begin rewarding relaxation. Remember, one of our goals is to make the crate the dog’s calm, safe place where they can sleep/relax. Toss a treat into the crate and give your dog their command to lie down. Praise and treat. Do not release the dog from their down. Wait for cues that the dog is relaxed, these include: sighing, rolling onto it’s side, stretching, yawning, licking their lips, resting their head on their paws, and even blinking. Praise them every time they do one of these things, try not to use large treats or excitable praise, just a calm “good” or “yes. After they have relaxed, and you have praised them, you may give them their release word.