



## Crate and Rotate

The information on this page is to assist owners in managing dogs who do not get along. Perhaps you acquired same-sex pit bulls and now that they have matured, they no longer tolerate each other. Maybe you have a multi-dog household, and two or more of your dogs have recently been fighting. Or you recently added a pit bull to your home, and it just isn't working out with the other dogs. Whatever the reason, we hope that you will be able to safely manage your pets and maintain them in your home. A pet is a lifetime commitment; re-homing should be a last resort.

Dog-dog aggression is common with this breed. A review of the information on these pages will help you understand why your dogs may not be getting along:

<http://www.pbrc.net/breedinfo.html>

<http://www.pbrc.net/faq.html>

It is important to recognize this behavior for what it is, and not assume that a) it will get better b) re-introductions will resolve it or c) that it is the end of the world. All too frequently, owners get lost in the "but why" "they used to love each other" "perhaps if I do X.Y. or Z, it will change." The reality is that this breed has selectively been bred to be aggressive towards other dogs. Whether or not your dog previously showed this behavior is not relevant anymore. You must take action to prevent fights and maintain the safety of your pets from this point forward.

So, what can you do now that you have accepted this reality?

### **CRATING**

Many owners of pit bulls crate and rotate their dogs. If your dog is not currently crate trained, now is the time to get started. It is important that you get your dog accustomed to the crate and that you do not use the crate for punishment. Crating your dogs, as part of a C&R program, is not punishment! It is a way for you to protect your dog's health and keep him/her safe! You should always view crating as part of positive, responsible ownership. If you have not previously crate trained your dog, here are some crate training links:

<http://www.wonderpuppy.net/canwehelp/crate.htm>

Make sure you invest in durable crates, as well as durable toys and chew items that your dog can enjoy while he/she is being crated. Remember, you want the dog to view the crate as a positive place, and you also want the dog to easily follow your cue to be crated. If you use the crate as punishment, you will have a dog that resists going into the crate.

Dogs should not be crated for an overly lengthy period of time. 4-8 hours is generally recommended.

Some owners who crate and rotate also find that it is beneficial to feed the dogs in their crates; feeding in crates not only helps the dogs to associate the crate with something positive (food), it also helps reduce the possibility of a fight occurring over resources (food).

Other "trigger" items such as bones, stuffed Kongs, rawhides, etc. should be given only in the crates. Many dogs consider these to be high-value items and worth fighting for. Giving them during crate time only helps minimize the chance of resource guarding.

## **GATING**

You might also invest in some durable, easy to install baby gates. These are available in stores, online catalogs, and popular pet catalogs. You will need to spend time with each dog individually training him/her to respect the baby gate. Do not let the dogs jump the baby gate, push them down, chew or paw on them. Barrier training link:

<http://www.shirleychong.com/keepers/archives/barrier.txt>

Another tip for training your dog to respect the barrier is to reinforce the dog for stopping and waiting before he/she reaches the barrier. You can do this by rewarding with food/treats, and also by teaching a "wait" cue. Once the dog has waited in place, you can release the gate as a reward. What you are teaching the dog here is that he/she must respect the gate and ask permission to get through. Never allow the dog to nudge or push the gate over; if he/she does, immediately place the dog on the other side of the gate. Put him/her in a sit/stay or "wait" command, then when the dog has demonstrated appropriate behavior, allow him/her to pass through. In addition, do not reward a whining or barking dog by opening the gate for him. The dog should wait quietly until you are ready for him/her to pass through.

Please keep in mind that baby gates should never be used as a way to separate dogs when you are not supervising them or are not present in the home. Most pit bulls can knock down or chew through a gate given enough time. However, gating can help create separate areas for the dogs so that each can be "free" in the home, yet have their own space.

Remember, while your dogs are loose, it is important to know where they are, have the barriers in place prior to letting them out, and to remove all potential items that could trigger a fight: food bowls, bones, favorite toys, etc.

## **SEPARATING**

You may find that your dogs need to be crated and separated in different areas of the house. If the fighting between the dogs has been particularly intense, separation via both crates and different rooms may be necessary. If your dogs can tolerate being near each other and not show signs of aggression, you may be able to crate them individually but in the same room. If you have a dog that guards the crate (i.e., is possessive of his/her space), it is advisable to separate them in different rooms.

## **ROTATING**

Depending on your household schedule and routine, you will need to come up with a system that works for you. If you have other household members (roommates, family members), you will also need to take their schedules into consideration. It is important, too, that once you have figured out a system, that everyone in the household is "on board" with the system.

It may take you weeks or months to get a routine that works for all involved. Once you establish that routine, stick to it. Dogs like routine, and will learn the "system" faster if you are consistent. Developing a consistent routine can include: identifying which crates you will use for which dogs, identifying where the crates are, determining which rooms they have access to, having scheduled times when they are out, having scheduled feeding times, etc.

If you have more than two dogs, it will be important to determine if any of them can be grouped together appropriately. Knowing which dogs can be rotated with each other will also be an important part of the routine. You may find that your dogs need to be rotated separately for all activities including feeding, exercise, and time with you, or you might find that if you have multiple dogs, a pair may be able to be exercised together or spend time with you together.

Additional considerations for maintaining dogs on a "Crate and Rotate" system include obedience training and adequate exercise. Dogs who are trained in basic obedience will be easier to manage within the home. Exercise helps keep your dogs fit both mentally and physically. It also burns off excess energy which can help reduce anxiety and tension.

### **OBEDIENCE TRAINING**

It is extremely important that your dogs become obedience trained. If you can take each dog separately to a class or work with a trainer, that will help your dogs and you establish a safe routine that is followed easily. You can do lots of in-home training as well; there are many great resources on the web. Training resource links:

<http://www.clickersolutions.com/articles/index.htm#behaviors>

<http://www.clickerlessons.com/>

**NOTE:** You do not need to use a clicker to follow many of the training plans on the above sites. The clicker is a reward marker; much like your voice saying "yes!" or "good dog!" You can just substitute your voice for a click.

Some commands your dogs should be able to follow consistently, which will allow for an easier C&R routine:

- come
- sit/stay
- down/stay
- crate command such as "kennel" "crate" "go to bed"
- "leave it"

### **ADEQUATE EXERCISE**

A healthy pit bull needs exercise! How much exercise each individual dog needs depends on his/her personality, metabolism, and fitness level. As a general rule, each dog should get a minimum of 30 minutes a day. There are lots of ways to exercise your pit bull:

■ Is your dog a retriever? Playing fetch or Frisbee is a great exercise activity!

If your dog doesn't know how to retrieve, now's a good time to teach it!

■ Long walks or if you are a jogger, take the dog running with you!

■ Consider purchasing a K-9 cruiser and taking your dog bicycling you!

Mental exercise can also tire a dog out while giving him/her something to do, a chance to learn, and also have positive interactions with the owner. Consider doing short training sessions with your dog(s). Practice some obedience or teach a new trick or task.

Remember that dogs learn best if the sessions are short (5-10 minutes) and upbeat!

