Crate Training

English Shepherds really want to be with their family. Many of them find creative ways to spend the time while they are alone waiting for the return of the ones they love the most. This is called separation anxiety. It is also called "destruction". Your dog will do creative things like: checking under the wall to wall carpet for monsters, getting the sofa ready to be reupholstered, re-sorting the recycling and garbage, assessing the amount of toilet paper left on the roll, or collecting all the pillows in the house in one place so they'll be easy to find (in that dark corner under the basement stairs.) Really helpful things that you just might not always appreciate.

If your dog isn't content to laze around all day playing with his Buster Cube or chewing on one of his many carefully selected toys then you might have to decide just how much help you really need on those daily redecorating chores.

Which is why many people crate their dogs. Some people think, "oh, I couldn't do that, that would be like putting him in jail all day". But you dog doesn't think of it that way, your dog thinks of it as a nice safe, cozy place to wait till you return. And think how much happier that return will be for both of you if the house is still in one piece.

The key is, of course, that when you are around your dog is still right at your side where he wants to be. And when you aren't around the crate is a safe and fun place to wait. The crate should have plenty of room for your dog to stand up and turn around. And it should not be used excessively. While you are at work, sure; but when you get home and just want to unwind for a half hour it would be cruel to leave your pup in the crate - unwind together. Use the crate when you vacuum but don't start thinking of the crate as a place to stash the dog every time he's a little underfoot.

You get the idea.

So, after all that preamble, here are some tips on how to help your dog learn to love his crate: (by Mark Abbott)

The day the crate arrives you can do a lot of work which will help you dog adjust to it. Get the crate out and set it up immediately. Put some especially yummy treats and favorite toys in there and make sure he knows it. Once he's checked it out enough that it's no longer scary, lead him to the crate and then lead him in with a particularly tasty treat. It may take a couple of tries if he's suspicious or nervous but with a good enough reward he'll start following your hand in. (Smelly treats are probably best for this. I'm particularly fond of tiny slices of hot dog, and I do mean tiny. You don't want him to get full, you want him to keep wanting MORE.)

Once you've got him following your hand in, give him the command to go to his crate (with our guys it's "go to your box") before you lead him in. Do this MANY times.

When he's happily following your hand in, start tossing the treat in so that he has to go in and get it on his own. Do this MANY times. Do sessions where you do it 20 times in a row. Stop in the middle of something else, walk over and send him in for a treat. Make it happen so many times that it becomes absolutely routine. At no time in this process do you ever force him in, he always goes in of his own free will.

When you've gotten him happily going into the crate on his own then you can send him in, close the door for just long enough to hand him a treat through the grating and then let him back out. Do THIS many times, gradually increasing the amount of time the door is closed but never going long enough he gets concerned. When he gets comfortable start closing the door and waiting for a minute or two before you let him out. If he's comfortable with it, feed him his meals in the crate, door open or closed based on where he is in this routine.

I'd recommend taking a couple of days to help him adjust to the crate before you start leaving him in there for any length of time. It's going to be a change for him and you don't want him to be upset by the change. If you can make the crate an absolutely mundane thing then he'll take to it that much quicker. Most dogs decide they like the crate very quickly but it never hurts to help the process along. Make sure that there are ALWAYS good toys in the crate. And even though you're maybe still feeling a little guilty about the crate, do you best not to feel it or show it when you work with him. He'll pick up on that and think something is wrong, even though it actually isn't.

By the way, never leave a collar on your dog when he's in the crate. It could get snagged on the grating and cause serious injuries.