



Puppy Crate Training

Prevent Potty & Chewing Mistakes

A crate is a great short-term tool for managing your new puppy while he’s learning where he’s supposed to potty and what he’s supposed to chew. Confining your puppy sets him up for success by preventing mistakes when you’re not home or can’t supervise. Because their natural instinct is to keep their sleeping area clean, most dogs won’t soil a crate as long as you keep their confinement short and take them out often. Plus, in a crate he can’t chew anything but the toys you give him. Once his appropriate elimination and chewing have become good habits, you can allow gradually longer periods of freedom in more areas of your house.

Short-term confinement



Your crate should be big enough for your pup to stand up, lie down, stretch out and circle. It should not be so big that he could soil in one end and sleep at the other.

How Long to Crate Your Puppy

At night, body systems slow down. That’s why puppies can go all night without eliminating once they’re old enough to have sufficient bladder and bowel control (about 4 months of age). But during the day, neither puppies nor adult dogs should be crated more than 4 hours at a time. When crating a puppy for more than 2 hours, provide a water bottle. (Using a bowl can create a mess.) These daytime guidelines will help avoid soiling or other behavior problems:

Age	Maximum time in crate
8–10 weeks	30–60 minutes
11–14 weeks	2 hours
15–16 weeks	3 hours
17+ weeks	4 hours maximum

Use a larger area—like an exercise pen or puppy-proofed room—for times when you’re gone or can’t supervise that are longer than your puppy can hold it in the crate. A kitchen is ideal because your puppy won’t feel isolated and it’s easy to clean.

Long-term confinement



Your long-term area is for times that are longer than your dog can hold it in the crate. Put potty pads or newspaper in one corner, and a bed, food, water and toys at the opposite corner.

Crate Training Steps

Unfortunately, you can’t just throw a puppy in a crate and expect him to adjust! That would be traumatic. You want to teach a positive association and introduce him to the crate gradually over days. Start by making the crate comfy with a mat or blanket. Put the crate in a central area, and then follow these steps. Move to the next step once your puppy is successful and comfortable at the current step:

1 – The Treat Fairy

Whenever your puppy isn’t looking, toss a few delicious treats or exciting new toys inside the crate and let her discover them on her own. Small pieces of chicken, cheese, freeze-dried liver or stuffed

Kongs work well. Your puppy will start to love the crate and check it out often just to see if the "treat fairy" has come. Play treat fairy your first week of crate training, leaving the door open.

2 – Room service

Feed your puppy his meals in the crate with the door open. Try putting the bowl in the back of the crate so your dog has to stand inside the crate to eat. If he resists going in at first, put the bowl just inside the door so he only has to put his head inside. As he becomes more comfortable, place the bowl a little farther back each time you feed him. Eventually, close the door while he eats.

3 – Training get in, get out

- **Step 1: Follow the treat** Give your puppy a cue ("go to bed" or "crate") and throw in a treat. Praise your puppy as he goes in to eat the treat. Then tell him "Okay", and encourage him to come out. Praise him for exiting but don't treat. You want the goodies associated with being *inside* the crate. Practice this 10 times in a row, then end your session.
- **Step 2: Follow the hand signal** The next session, tell your dog "Go to bed," and just point to the crate (don't throw a treat in). When he goes in, give him a treat. Say "Okay," and encourage your puppy out. Do this 5 times, take a break, then repeat another 5 times.

4 – Get in, stay a bit with the door closed

- First praise and treat your puppy immediately after he enters the crate, then close the door for several seconds (don't latch it yet). Feed him several treats through the closed door.
- Gradually increase (by a few seconds each time) the time your dog stays in the crate with the door closed.
- As you increase time, throw in random short repetitions to keep the training from always getting harder. Over several sessions, gradually build up to one minute of crate time.
- Also practice walking around the crate and around the room while he's inside, giving him frequent treats randomly throughout. Make it a positive experience!

5 – Get in, chill out awhile

- Rent a DVD movie and stuff a Kongs for your puppy. Set the crate right next to your couch, and tell your dog to get in. When he does, give him a stuffed Kong, close the door and start the movie. Leave the room a few times for popcorn or drinks.
- Ignore whining or barking. Don't open the crate, or you will have rewarded misbehavior.
- When the movie is over, if your dog is quiet, let him out. Don't gush over him or hug him. Make the exit ho-hum. You want the good stuff to happen while your puppy's *in* the crate.

6 – Alone time

- While your puppy is in the crate, move around your house going about your usual business. Ignore or mildly reprimand any noise.
- Once your puppy is going in her crate without fuss and doesn't bark or whine while inside, you can start to leave the house. Be sure to give your puppy a stuffed Kong or interesting chew toy to keep her occupied and ease anxiety.
- Start with very short absences, like 1 minute. Do lots of these short "alone time" repetitions.
- Gradually extend the time you're gone, from 1 minute, to 5, to 10, 30, an hour, 2 hours, and so on. Again, occasionally throw in easy, short repetitions.
- Try to depart and arrive without fanfare. Tire your puppy out with vigorous exercise and training before longer absences (2 to 4 hours). It's important to gradually condition your puppy to being in the crate this way before using it in your day-to-day life.

When NOT to Use a Crate

Dogs who suffer from separation anxiety should not be crated. Ask us for additional help if your pup shows signs of separation anxiety, like destructiveness, vocalizing or house soiling when she's left by herself in the house. Some dogs don't tolerate crating well due to other types of fears or anxieties, like thunder phobia. Don't crate your dog if you see signs of anxiety like:

- Damage to the crate from your dog's attempts to escape
 - Damage to surrounding objects that she's able to reach
 - Wet chest fur or a lot of wetness in the bottom of the crate from drooling
 - Urination or defecation in the crate
 - Your dog moves the crate while she's inside
 - Excessive barking or howling during your absence. (You can get reports from neighbors or record your dog's behavior using a video camera.)
- In addition, don't crate your puppy if:
- She's too young to have sufficient bladder or bowel control
 - She has diarrhea or vomiting
 - You must leave her alone for longer than the crate duration guidelines on page 1
 - She hasn't eliminated shortly before going in the crate
 - The temperature is uncomfortably high
 - She has not had sufficient exercise, companionship and socialization.

Decreasing Confinement, Increasing Freedom

You can begin to give your dog more freedom in your house once she's thoroughly house trained, has eliminated consistently outside with no accidents for one month, and chews or destroys only her own toys — not your house or household items. The right time to give your dog more freedom will depend on her individual ability. Some dogs can be destructive when alone until they are about two years old, while others can be trusted at one year or less.

Here are suggested steps toward increasing your dog's freedom outside the crate:

- Start with brief absences with your dog free in your house. Be sure to dog-proof your home before you go. Put your garbage away and pick up items you don't want your dog to chew. Leave out several toys that she *can* chew. You want to set her up to succeed!
- Don't give her freedom in the whole house at first. Use baby gates or close doors to prevent her from getting into rooms you don't want her in yet. Or try confining her to just one room, like the kitchen or laundry room.
- Walk out the door and run a short five-minute errand. If you come home to a mess, try a shorter absence.
- If, after a couple more attempts at short absences, your dog is still making messes, she might not be mature enough to be left alone in the house yet. Alternatively, her continued destructiveness might mean she has separation anxiety. If you think your dog might have separation anxiety, please ask us for further help.
- If you return and there are no messes, over many weeks gradually lengthen your absences.

Crate training & house training go hand in hand, so be sure to also read [Puppy House Training](#).