

Crate training your dog can take a little time, but it's very useful in a variety of situations. If you have a new dog or puppy, you can use the crate to limit access to the house until he learns all the house rules - like what he can and can't chew on and where he can and can't eliminate. A crate is also a safe way of transporting your dog in the car, as well as a way of taking him places where he may not be welcome to run freely. If you properly train your dog to use the crate, he'll think of it as a safe place and will be happy to spend time there when needed.

Selecting A Crate

Your dog's crate should be just large enough for him to stand up and turn around in. If you have a growing puppy and want to purchase a larger crate, you can use a divider. Some crates come with a wire divider-panel, or you can stuff an inexpensive large pillow/cushion in the back of the crate while your puppy is still small then remove it when they grow. Plastic and metal wire crates each have their pros and cons, but the choice largely comes down to preference (either the dog's or the human's). Some dogs like the closed-in plastic crates while others do better with more visibility in wire crates. Go with what works best for you and your pup.

The Crate Training Process

Crate training can take days or weeks, depending on your dog's age, temperament and past experiences. The crate should always be associated with something pleasant, and training should take place in a series of small steps - don't go too fast.

Step 1: Introduce Your Dog to the Crate

Put the crate in a high-traffic area of your house with a soft blanket or towel in the crate. Encourage your dog to enter the crate by dropping some treats near the opening, then just inside the door, and finally, all the way inside the crate. If he refuses to go all the way in at first, that's okay - don't force him to enter. Continue tossing treats into the crate until your dog will walk calmly all the way into the crate to get the food. If he isn't interested in treats, try tossing a favorite toy in the crate. During this step you won't be closing the door, leave it propped open. This step may take a few minutes or as long as several days.

Step 2: Feeding Your Dog Meals in the Crate

After introducing your dog to the crate, feed him his regular meals near the crate. This will create a pleasant association with the crate. Each time you feed him, place the dish a little further back in the crate.

Once your dog is standing comfortably in the crate to eat his meal, you can close the door while he's eating. At first, open the door as soon as he finishes his meal. With each feeding, leave the door closed a few minutes longer, until he's staying in the crate for ten minutes or so after eating. If he begins to whine to be let out, you may have increased the length of time too quickly. If he does whine or cry in the crate, wait until he stops before you let him out. You may have to wait for a brief moment when your dog stops whining, but don't let your dog think that whining "works" to get out of the crate.

Step 3: Conditioning Your Dog to the Crate for Longer Time Periods

After your dog is eating his regular meals in the crate with no sign of fear or anxiety, you can confine him there for short time periods while you're home. Give him a command such as "crate," toss a treat inside for him to get and close the door. Wait for a couple minutes and then let him out. Repeat this process several times a day. With each repetition, gradually increase the length of time he remains in the crate.

Once he's comfortable in the crate while you're in sight, then practice leaving the room for short periods of time before you let him out. Remember not to let him out while he is whining. Once your dog will stay quietly in the crate for about 30 minutes with you out of sight the majority of the time, you can move to the next step.

Step 4: Crating Your Dog when left Alone

After your dog is spending about 30 quiet minutes in the crate, you can begin leaving him crated for short periods when you leave the house. Put him in the crate using your regular command with a treat and a few safe toys. Keep your departure and arrivals quiet and low-key, and vary how long before you leave that you put the dog in his crate. You want your dog to learn that it's no big deal when you leave, and you always come back. Continue to crate your dog for short periods from time to time when you're home so he doesn't associate crating with being left alone. When allowing your dog out of the crate, do not allow him to rush out as soon as you open the door. Ask him to Wait and block his exit until he will sit and make eye contact with you. This will be difficult the first few times, but it will soon become part of the crating routine.

Before leaving your dog in the crate for a long period of time, make sure he/she is tired by going for a long walk and/or playing fetch with your dog. It's also important to give your dog something to do while in the crate when you're gone. Click [this link](#) to see a list of Canine Enrichment ideas.

Troubleshooting

Too Much Time In the Crate

A crate isn't a magical solution. If not used correctly, a dog can feel trapped and frustrated. For example, if your dog is crated all day while you're at work and then crated again all night, he's spending too much time in too small of a space. Make other arrangements to accommodate his physical and emotional needs. Also remember that puppies under six months of age shouldn't stay in a crate for more than three or four hours at a time. They can't control their bladders and bowels for longer periods.

Your dog isn't yet fully crate trained but you have to go to work, what do you do? Try NOT to force your dog into the crate, this will lead to a negative association with the crate and it will get increasingly harder to get your dog into the crate. If your dog cannot yet be trusted alone in your home outside the crate, try to find another solution for confining your pup. Use a small room/space that you can block off the entrance with a baby gate (or two, with one stacked on top of the other). This will give your dog a bit more space and allow your dog to look out but not get out. If possible, place the crate in this same space and make the crate the "comfy zone" with a blanket and toys inside. Don't forget to leave something for your dog to do via favorite toys and a food-puzzle toy to occupy your dog while you are gone. And don't forget to continue to work on crate training when you have some time to devote to the process. Click [this link](#) to read a document on how to use Skype to "nanny cam", or "spy", on your dog when you're away so you can see what's really happening when you are gone.

You've come home to discover your dog has busted out of the crate.

Don't get angry and scold/punish your dog. It's too late and your dog will not understand why you are so mad. Busting out of the crate is a sure sign that your dog is not yet crate trained. Once your pup has successfully gotten out of the crate, he/she will try again the next time, and the next. Try the above idea for confinement and reach out to our behavior team for more help with crate training.

Whining

If your dog whines or cries while in the crate at night, it may be hard to figure out if he needs to go potty or just wants out. If you followed the steps above, your dog hasn't previously been rewarded for whining. Try to ignore the whining. If your dog is testing you, he should stop whining. Don't yell at him or pound on the crate. If the whining continues after you've ignored him for several minutes, use the phrase

he associates with going outside. If he responds and becomes excited, take him outside. This should be a trip with a purpose, not play time. If you are sure that your dog doesn't need to eliminate then the best response is to ignore him until he stops whining. Don't give in or you'll teach your dog to whine loud and long to get what he wants. If you've progressed gradually through the training steps and haven't done too much too fast, you'll be less likely to encounter this problem. If the problem persists, go back and work through the steps of crate training again.

Separation Anxiety

Attempting to use the crate as a remedy for separation anxiety won't solve the problem. A crate may prevent your dog from being destructive, but he may injure himself in an attempt to escape from the crate. Separation anxiety problems can only be resolved with counter-conditioning and desensitization procedure. Please contact our behavior team if your dog is experiencing separation anxiety.

Additional Tips to help your dog be happy in the crate

Every dog is different and sometimes it just takes a bit of trial-and-error to find what your dog likes best. Here are some tips to try.

- Play soft music or talk radio for your dog when you leave.
- Leave your dog with a stuffed Kong or other chew toy (see [Canine Enrichment link](#)).
- Leave something with your scent on it in the crate. This can be an old, unwashed t-shirt, pillowcase or towel.
- Try a pheromone spray or diluted lavender oil in a diffuser.
- Try placing the crate near a window so your pup can see out. Or, just the opposite, making the crate more of a cave-like environment.
- One or two days a week at doggie-daycare can make the rest of the week (at home in the crate) go very smoothly.