

## What is a crate?

- Crates are six-sided enclosures with one or more doors. The sides can be open wire, solid plastic (aka “airline crates”), or solid fabric with zippers.
- Crates are training tools designed to confine a dog within a small space for a variety of purposes, such as those described below.

## Crating Tips

- Avoid using a crate as a place to “send” your dog for punishment. Dogs can quickly learn to avoid the crate or associate it with fear, anxiety, or distress. This may result in resistance or refusal to go inside, extreme agitation, or attempts to escape.
- Ensure the crate is a safe, fun, happy place for your dog to relax or voluntarily hang out.
- If you are using the crate because your dog is destructive in the house, try to determine why your dog is misbehaving and address the underlying causes (rather than focusing on the outward behavior). You may need to contact a skilled dog trainer or behavior consultant to assist you – check out APDT’s trainer search at [www.apdt.com/petowners/ts](http://www.apdt.com/petowners/ts).
- Crates should not be used as long-term dog “storage” places, babysitters, or replacements for supervision and training.
- Crate dogs for limited, predictable amounts of time with plenty of exercise, mental stimulation, and appropriate outlets.
- You should not leave any dog crated longer than their physical bladder capacity which, depending on a variety of variables, which may be no more than an hour or so depending on the dog.
- Do provide regular breaks for exercise, social contact, and urination/defecation. Limited time in crates is especially important for puppies, seniors, and dogs with any health concerns. A very general guideline is providing breaks every four to five hours for healthy, adult, anxiety-free adult dogs.
- If you have a dog that is anxious, don’t use the crates to contain him or her without consulting a professional first. For some dogs, confinement can alleviate anxiety, but for others it can exacerbate the problem and pose very serious dangers. Check out APDT’s trainer search at [www.apdt.com/petowners/ts](http://www.apdt.com/petowners/ts).
- Try to make the crate a fun, happy place for your dog and avoid “tricking” dogs into going into the crate or slam the door shut behind them. They will quickly learn to not trust you and avoid the crate.
- When closing the door, do so slowly and deliberately so the dog can see you and the dog is not stressed by the sound and movement of the crate door.
- A collar can catch on the metal grating and accidentally injure the dog so take your dog’s collar off when crating them.
- Don’t put the crate in a high traffic area of your house or let children, adults or other animals in the home tease the dog in the crate.
- Find a nice, quiet area for your dog so he will not be overly stimulated by noise and activity passing by him.
- When opening the crate, don’t make a big deal out of it to avoid rewarding them for exiting the crate. Remain calm and quiet when you let the dog out of the crate, and save your praise and love for several minutes later.



## Setting up the crate

### ***Size matters!***

As a housetraining tool, crates should provide a space just large enough to stand up tall, turn around, fully stretch out, and lie down comfortably. This limited space takes advantage of a dog’s natural preference to avoid stepping in their own waste, thereby teaching them to “hold it.” For confining fully housetrained dogs, crates can be somewhat larger to give a dog more space to move around.

### ***Tips***

- This natural preference will be lost if a dog is confined for too long and forced to relieve themselves on their

bedding.

- If your dog or puppy is relieving themselves in one area of the crate, and napping in another – the crate is too large.
- Too large crates can be used for puppies or small dogs by restricting how much space they can access with dividing walls or placing non-chewable items to take up space inside.

### **Comfy cozy:**

Always make the crate a pleasant place for your dog to be. If your dog is already housetrained and your dog is not a chewer, you can add some soft bedding. Stuff that smells like you are particularly good for dogs that are newly adopted, as it will create a pleasant association for the dog with your scent, and this actually is helpful for dogs that are anxious when left alone. Examples include your unwashed pillow cases, towels, or t-shirts.

Be sure to monitor to make sure that the dog doesn't chew on these items or kick them to the side and eliminate on them. If the dog does this you may need to not leave any bedding in the crate. Give the dog something to chew on, such as a toy. Make sure that the toy is a sturdy one that will not break or be digested by the dog while he is in the crate with it and you are unable to supervise him. Food toys stuffed with non-choking snacks are perfect.

### **Introducing the crate**

The following steps are general guidelines to ensure your dog is happy to go into the crate. It may take several days, or just a few moments to progress through these steps.

If you are consistent, the dog should quickly learn that the crate is a nice place to be—he gets to lie down in a soft spot and gets to chew on something he enjoys. Once you have successfully trained your dog to accept the crate, you can leave the crate open in your house. You may find that your dog will go into the crate and lie down there on his own with the door open, and enjoy a nice cozy place they can snuggle into and retire from the world.

1. Toss a few treats into the back of the crate. If your dog hesitates at all, go to the next step. If he eagerly enters the crate without hesitation, skip to step 8.
2. Feed the dog his meal next to the crate until you see no hesitation in response to the crate.
3. Place the dog's meal just inside the crate until you see no hesitation in response to the crate.
4. Place the dog's meal about halfway inside the crate until you see no hesitation in response to the crate.
5. Place the dog's meal all the way into the back of the crate until you see no hesitation in response to the crate.
6. Place the dog's meal all the way into the back of the crate, and gently close the door behind him while he eats. When he is finished, let him out.
7. Place the dog's meal all the way into the back of the crate, and gently close the door behind him while he eats. Wait for a few minutes to pass after completing the meal, and let him out.
8. Toss a food toy or chew toy into the back of the crate. Close the crate door (but don't try to "trick" your dog inside! Let him see you.). As long as he is relaxed and enjoys the chew item, allow him to stay in the crate for up to 5 minutes. If he panics at all, contact a professional.
9. Repeat step 8, and increase the amount of time by 5-10 minute increments. Keep repeating until you get up to an hour with a calm, happy dog inside the crate. If the dog panics at all, contact a professional.
10. Set the crate up with some toys near where you will be. For example, if you are sitting down to read the newspaper in the kitchen, set the crate in the kitchen where the dog can see you, and then sit down and read. If you planning on watching a TV show, set the crate up near the couch and proceed to watch your show. Intermittently talk to your dog in a calm, happy tone of voice and occasionally toss a treat to let him know he's being a good boy for calming lying in the crate.
11. Repeat step 10, and increase the amount of time by 5-10 minute increments. Keep repeating until you get up to an hour with a calm, happy dog inside the crate.

### **Tips**

- Examples of food toys include Kongs, Busy Buddy toys, Buster Cubes, etc.
- Stuff hollow rubber toys with a little bit of peanut butter; cream cheese, cheese wiz, cottage cheese, applesauce, plain yogurt, etc. mixed with kibble or broken up dry dog biscuits. Be creative! You may even try to freeze it, as this makes it harder for the dog to get the food out and increases the time his attention will be occupied.

### **Crates and chewing**

Crates are useful tools to keep teething puppies, chewing adolescents, and bored dogs out of trouble. When you can't be there to supervise, crating with appropriate chew toys not only protects your table legs, but also encourages dogs to develop appropriate chewing habits. Further, when dogs are house-trained with crates, they tend to be less destructive with your household items when left out of the crate because they associate chewing with being in the crate.

### **Crates and housetraining**

You can expect to housetrain a "normal," well-adjusted adult dog within three to five days using a crate. Puppies, of course, will take longer due to their smaller bladder capability and urination/defecation frequency. The more consistent you are, the more you will see a difference.

### **Supervision and Confinement**

If a dog or puppy is not fully housetrained, an adult should know where the dog is and what they are doing 100% of the time. This is accomplished through supervision and confinement:

1. If you are not able directly supervise the dog, their movement may be restricted through the use of closed doors, baby gates, or tethering. Tethering means the dog is tied to an adult via a leash (looped around the waist, through a belt, through a belt loop, etc.)
2. Dogs should be confined anytime an adult's attention is not focused on the dog, such as when they must leave the house. Confinement should never be allowed to extend beyond a few hours and should not replace appropriate supervision during tasks like cooking, talking on the phone, watching TV, etc – during which supervision or tether is more appropriate.

### **Going Outside**

For puppies and adults that are not at all housetrained, allow breaks from the crate approximately once every hour or so. You can go for longer but the more opportunities you give the puppy to be reinforced for going outside, the quicker they will learn.

1. FIRST, grab some especially good treats before going to the crate!
2. Take your dog IMMEDIATELY outside by running with them on-leash to your door
3. Try to stand in one general area outside and give your dog happy, verbal encouragement (Go Potty!).
4. If the dog eliminates, give him some of the treats, praise him calmly and happily, he can then have play time or go back inside.
5. It is ok to let the puppy run loose in the house, as long as he is supervised by you 100%.
6. After about an hour, he can go back in the crate or be tethered, and restart the whole process again within the hour.

### **Tips**

- Most puppies will eliminate within five minutes of taking them outside.
- Puppies should go outside immediately after playing, eating, or napping
- If the puppy does not eliminate, take him back inside and put him in the crate for another 10 min. Say nothing to him and do not give him treats. Then take him back outside to the same place and try again.

If you are consistent with this pattern, your puppy will quickly learn that if he holds his urine and feces until you take him outside, not only will he get relief and be able to eliminate, but he will get a treat and playtime as well. As your puppy or dog starts to demonstrate that he has learned the "rules" you can begin to phase out the food treats and replace with praise and petting, or play time with you or with a toy.

## **Sleeping**

Non housetrained dogs may have to be crated through the night, to ensure they don't hop out of your bed to potty on the floor (or even at the foot of your bed!). Puppies will need to be woke up to go outside, and then you can bring them back to the crate to go back to sleep.

## **Size of Crate**

The crate should be big enough for the dog to stretch on his side, and get up and turn around without his head hitting the top. A crate that is too big is better than one that is too small.

For an adult dog, measure from the tip of the dog's nose to the base of his tail for the proper crate length, and from the ground to the top of his skull for height. For puppies, do the same, and add about 12" for his anticipated adult height. With puppies, you may want to block out the extra area of the crate so that he does not eliminate in the far corner. You can buy a smaller crate and buy a new, larger one when he becomes an adult, but many crates can be bought with "dividers" so that you do not have to buy a brand new one when your dog grows older.

Crates come in wire mesh or in plastic "Varikennels" that have a wire grating on the door and along the sides. The wire mesh crates are usually collapsible which makes for easier storage, and you can easily place a blanket or towel on top of them to provide more privacy for the dog. Either crate works fine, although we prefer the wire mesh crates