# Crate Training for Puppies and Dogs

Wondering how to begin crate training your puppy or dog, or even whether you should? This page will tell you.

Crate training gets a dog so used to being closed into a crate that he or she can safely be left in it for a few hours at a time. It can greatly speed up the process of potty training a puppy or dog.

The method has its pros and cons. If it works for your dog, it gives both you and the dog a wonderful flexibility in many situations. But if it isn’t right for your dog, there are good alternatives to crate training.

**This page offers pros and cons, a basic** [method for crate training](http://www.training-dogs.com/crate-training.html#method), some [tips](http://www.training-dogs.com/crate-training.html#tips) on making it work, and [some alternatives](http://www.training-dogs.com/crate-training.html#alternatives).

### Crate Training: PRO

Crate training helps tremendously in [potty training puppies and adult dogs](http://www.training-dogs.com/potty-training-dogs.html).

Your dog can be confined when it is necessary, without undue stress on the dog or serious wear and tear on your home.

If your dog ever has to be left at a veterinarian’s office, travel on an airplane, or be evacuated from your home, being in a crate then will be **far less stressful** if he is already crate-trained.

It’s a **nice way to include a puppy in what is going on** without your having to tend him constantly, for example, if you are giving a party.

Many dogs will **seek out their crates** to relax in.

### Crate Training: CON

It may take some time to get your dog accustomed to being left in the dog crate, and you will need another way to confine him so you don’t push the crate training too fast.

Some people might leave their dogs in the crates too much. How much is too much? It depends on the dog and situation.

Crate training **isn’t suitable for some dogs**. For example, a dog who has spent a lot of time in crates or cages (in a shelter or at a previous owner’s) may become very upset. You may or may not be able to overcome this with patient training.

Dogs with **separation anxiety** may become more upset in a crate than in a larger space.

A strong, **frantic dog can get out** of most crates, perhaps hurting himself in the process.

**Some people just hate the idea** of confining their dogs this way. Learning more about crate training often overcomes this dislike, but if you find that it doesn’t for you, then use alternatives to crates.

### A Basic Crate Training Method

First, of course, you need a crate.. There are many great crates out there, but make sure you pick one that will be appropriate for the size of your dog once it is full grown. A proper sized crate should be large enough to allow a dog to natural stand, sit, and turn around without touching the sides.

Select a good location for the crate — or more than one location. **In your bedroom** is good at night, but while you are home during the day, it’s best to have the crate **near where people will be**. Either move the crate around, or some people have two crates. Don’t put the crate where sunlight coming in from a window will make the air hot for the dog or force him to be in the sun.

Tie the door open, or even take it off at first. Let the dog notice the crate and examine it if he wishes.

Bit by bit, **make it more interesting.** Throw toys or treats in. Talk lovingly to him if he goes in. Pet him while he is in the crate.

**Begin feeding the dog** in the crate. When he is comfortable going in (and this can be anything from an hour to several weeks), then begin closing the door for very short periods of time while you are right there.

If he whines to get out, don’t let him out and don’t sweet-talk him until there is a moment when he isn’t whining. Just wait till he is quiet. Then you can let him out. If you let him out while he is whining, you are teaching him that whining works with you.

With each of the steps, pay attention to what the dog indicates about his feelings. **Crate training is most effective when it isn’t rushed**. If he is uncomfortable at a particular step, back up to a previous one.

Once he accepts the door closed while you are there, begin going elsewhere in your home and **gradually lengthening the time** you are gone. Having toys in the crate is useful here.

Then leave the house for a very short time and come back, working up to leaving for longer time.

Close the dog in at bedtime and let it out first thing in the morning. But once the dog behaves without being locked in at night, leave the door open or remove it from the crate (unless you are using it during the day sometimes) and keep it nearby. If you are housetraining a young puppy, you will probably be going outside with it in the middle of the night for a while.

### Crate Training Tips

Never put the dog into the crate as punishment. You want the dog to think of it in a happy way.

You have to go back to work and your new puppy or dog still isn’t completely crate-trained or reliable when loose in the house. **What to do?** Create an alternative space for a while (see below), or crate the dog and ask a friend or neighbor to come by several times during the day, either as a favor or for pay, to let the dog out for a while. Or hire a pet sitter.

Be sure to leave some toys or treats with the dog. There are many good choices like the Kong, a bouncy rubber dog toy that you can fill with dog treats, peanut butter, cheese, etc., to occupy your dog for a good long time. (It’s excellent for occupying an uncrated dog too.)

If a dog is tired out, he will accept the crate more willingly. That means exercise! **Many dog behavior problems diminish with exercise.**

You may have read that crate-training is “natural” because dogs are descended from wolves, who live in dens. While there is a grain of truth in that, a crate is also an **artificial confinement device** which many people use mainly for their own convenience. So use it as little as possible with the door closed!

Keep an eye on the crate for signs that the dog became frustrated and tried to get out.

* You can combine clicker training with crate training. Click when the dog goes in, then give a treat.

 **Alternatives to Crate Training**

Three alternatives:

1. Use an exercise pen.
2. Create a dog-safe part of your home.
3. Create a dog-safe area outside.

##### 1. Exercise pens:

Exercise pens (commonly called ex-pens) are sturdy wire enclosures that don’t typically have floors. Most don’t come with ceilings, but some do. They can provide a larger space for your dog than a crate does.

They can be tipped over, and without a floor they provide no housebreaking protection. A dog prone to jumping or climbing might get out — so **know your dog before using one**. They come in heights of 18 inches to four feet, and can be used indoors and outdoors. They fold flat for storage.

##### 2. Create a dog-safe part of your home

“Dog-safe” depends on whether or not your dog is potty trained yet. Often people confine their dogs in bathrooms, but if you do, be sure there aren’t chemicals or other things the dog might accidentally get into. (What’s under the sink? You can buy latches with clips on them at hardware stores.) You can use an exercise pen, or a baby gate, to divide this part of your house from the rest and still be able to see and hear the dog.

If you are potty training the dog, as a rule of thumb he will be more inclined to hold it in a quite small space, like a crate.

Some people have made dog areas in the bottom of a closet. (You would take off the door and use a gate instead… or cut a hole in the door.) Just be sure to remove all your shoes! And be sure your dog likes it.

##### 3. Create a dog-safe area outside

If you have a **securely fenced yard**, terrific! You may want to add a dog door so your dog can come and go — to the whole house or a selected part.

Otherwise, you can get a kennel or an outside playpen for your dog. Be sure that your dog always has shade and protection from rain, etc., as well as drinking water.

Also **be sure that his barking isn’t tormenting your neighbors**. Ask people who live near you to let you know if he does bark much.

It **may not be safe to leave your dog outside** by himself, whether in a fenced yard, a kennel, ex-pen, or whatever. Besides unsupervised children passing by, in some areas there are risks of theft. If you have any doubts, talk to others in your community, and be cautious.



### Crate Training Dogs: Well Worth the Trouble!

If everyone did crate training, there would be **far fewer dogs in shelters** because they never quite got potty trained or they were too destructive.