



# Crate Training Your Dog

Just as you would not leave a two-year old child alone in your house, you should not leave your dog unsupervised until he is completely trained. A dog left alone will make choices. Choices like: “Where should I urinate?” and “Should I chew up the rug or play with my toys?”

Dogs under 2 years of age, as well as older dogs having difficulty with house training or destructive chewing, are excellent candidates for crate training. If you have just brought your new dog home, it is critical that you start crate training the first day. Establishing a regular schedule and getting your dog accustomed to being alone are important for his mental adjustment.

The key to protecting your home and your dog is **prevention**. By successfully crate training your dog you’re able to prevent him from learning inappropriate behavior in your house. The concept of crating is simple: dogs possess a denning instinct. Their crate (if introduced properly) can quickly become their “room” or the place they can go to feel secure.

Dogs also don’t like to eliminate where they sleep, so the crate is an effective house training tool. Dogs of any age can learn to enjoy a crate, as long as you are patient and make their crating experience pleasant right from the start.

## Crate Size and Location

First, be sure your dog’s crate is the right size. Crates should be *just* large enough for the dog to stand up, turn around and lie down comfortably. If it is too big, he may urinate in one corner and lay in the other, making house training more difficult. Next, make sure to put the crate in a high-traffic area so the dog is not isolated while in his crate. Once you have got the size and location of the crate all set, it is time to begin getting your dog used to the crate.

## Teaching Your Dog to Like the Crate

Open the door to the crate and drop a small food treat in the middle of the crate. Praise the dog when he goes in to retrieve the treat and allow him to exit the crate as he chooses. Keep the door open and practice until the dog is happily entering the crate to get the treat. Then, drop the food treat all the way to the back of the crate. Again, let your dog retrieve the food treat and leave the crate whenever he wants. The goal is to teach him to relate the crate with good things!

When it is time for your dog to eat a regular meal, put his food bowl in the back of his crate with the door open. Let him go in and eat his food and leave when he’s ready. If he won’t go in, wait him out, even if he skips a meal or two. When he is hungry, he will eat in the crate. Practice until he is comfortable eating his entire meal in his crate.

Next, give your dog his favorite chew toy in the crate. A Kong™ stuffed with peanut butter, cheese spread or moist dog food works well. Toss it toward the back of the crate and, once he has entered, close the door briefly. Gradually increase the amount of time the door is closed. Don’t encourage your dog to leave the crate when you open the door. If he wants to lay inside and play with his toy, let him!

## Tips for Successful Crate Training

By following these steps, you should be well on your way to a dog who is comfortable in his crate with the door closed. While you're practicing, keep the following tips in mind:

- **Always remove your dog's collar before crating to prevent it or his tags from getting caught and causing serious injury.**
- Crates are never to be used for punishment. Used properly, a dog is crated **before** he is able to chew a table leg. **Never crate your dog after correcting him for inappropriate behavior.** He will develop a negative association with the crate and won't learn anything - except to dislike his crate.
- Use praise effectively. Praise your dog for going into the crate and for staying in it quietly. When you let him out, don't give him praise or treats. It should be a big deal to go into the crate and stay there and insignificant to leave.
- Never give your dog treats or attention for barking or whining in the crate, and never let him out while he is vocalizing. If you do, he may make a connection between vocalizing and getting what he wants.
- Puppies under four months of age cannot physically hold their urine for eight hours. If you are crate training a young puppy, make arrangements for someone to let him out at least every four hours.
- Refrain from placing blankets or towels in the crate until your dog is completely house trained. Dogs can learn to urinate on the blanket left in their crate and push it into the corner, so they don't have to sit in urine. This makes house training more difficult.
- Don't leave food and water in the crate when you're gone. Remember: what goes in, must come out. If your dog has free access to food and water the entire time you're gone but doesn't have the ability to eliminate until you come home, he may be forced to eliminate in the crate.
- It's important to crate your dog while you are home as well as when you are gone. If your dog is in a high activity room, he can be with the family and in his crate at the same time. That way, he won't learn to associate the crate with being left alone.

Watch for signs of separation anxiety. Some dogs "over" bond to their owners and panic when left alone. ***These dogs should not be crated.*** Owners of dogs suffering from separation anxiety should contact the Behavior Helpline for assistance. Some signs of separation anxiety include: urinating or defecating in the house only when you are gone, destruction focused around doors and/or windows, excessive vocalizing, self mutilation (raw nose or broken nails), or excessive salivating.

For additional information regarding pet behavior and training, please **visit our website at [michiganhumane.org](http://michiganhumane.org).**