

Teaching your dog to be comfortable at home without you is just as important as teaching them to Sit, Stay, or walk nicely on leash. There will be times when your dog needs to spend time alone or will need to be confined to another section of the house for their safety or the safety of others. Having a dog that is comfortable being alone or separated from you not only reduces their stress, but yours, as well!

There are two options for keeping your dog safely contained indoors, depending on how long you'll be away.

CRATE TRAINING: SHORT-TERM CONFINEMENT

Crates can be wonderful tools that come in handy when traveling and when you need your dog contained for short periods of time (6 hours or less for adult dogs). While some dog owners are uncomfortable with the idea of crates at first, many dogs like them **when introduced properly**, choosing to rest in their crates even when the owners are home.

The crate you choose should be large enough that your dog can stand up and turn around comfortably. You'll want to set up the crate in a quiet area. Most dog owners choose to keep the crate in their bedroom. Your dog should always have fresh water available.

LONG-TERM CONFINEMENT (6+ HOURS)

If you leave for longer than 6 hours, your dog may need to relieve themselves, especially puppies, dogs under 12 months old, and toy breeds. A long-term confinement area provides your dog with a bed or crate, water, and a potty area.

An exercise pen (as shown) can be useful for small to medium dogs, while a laundry room, kitchen, or bathroom with a baby gate across the entrance is good for dogs of any size. Potty areas can be:

- **Puppy pads**
- **Litterbox.** Dogs can use a litterbox, too! See the *Housetraining* handout for details.



Long-term Confinement: Exercise pen with room for crate/bed, water, and puppy pad or litterbox.

CONFINEMENT TRAINING STARTS ON DAY 1

Bringing home your new dog is very exciting and you'll want to spend time getting to know them. But also give your dog at least 2-3 breaks on the first day in their crate or

confinement area. This establishes a routine that will make it easier for your dog the first time you leave the house.

To start, toss a few treats inside the confinement area and leave the door/gate open. Don't force your dog in. One negative experience could jeopardize your future training success. Instead, give them the freedom to choose to enter on their own.

Give your dog a Kong™ stuffed with good stuff (we recommend a banana mashed with 1-2 tablespoons of peanut butter or steamed rice mixed with canned dog food) or a long-lasting chew like a bully stick and let them chew it in the confinement area with the door shut.

You can sit near them while reading a book or watching a video at first, then gradually move further away every few minutes. Once they seem relaxed, release them for more time with you.

On weekends/holidays/work-from-home days, give your dog rest periods in the confinement area. Rest periods can be 15 minutes to several hours.

SUMMARY

Confinement training is not only useful in everyday life, but can ensure the safety of your dog. It also prevents many common problems that occur when dogs are left in the yard, including destruction caused by digging or chewing, as well as problem barking or escapes.

Keep it positive and **be generous** with the goodies your dog gets in their area. The more positive experiences they have, the easier it will be for everyone when it's time to leave!

SEPARATION ANXIETY

If your dog is escaping their confinement areas, vocalizing (barking, howling, crying) when left alone, damaging doors or windows, or injuring themselves when left alone, it could be the sign of an anxiety disorder. **In such cases, crates increase the dog's anxiety and are strongly discouraged.**

Depending on the level of your dog's anxiety, your veterinarian may need to prescribe anti-anxiety medication as part of a behavior modification program.

See our handout on *Separation Anxiety* for more information.

If you suspect your dog is showing signs of separation anxiety, contact our Behavior Helpline at (916) 504-2848 to speak to one of our behavior specialists.