

PREPARING DOGS FOR YOUR ABSENCE

Having a dog that is comfortable being alone or separated from you not only reduces their stress, but yours, as well! There are types of confinement, depending on how long your dog will be alone.

CRATE: 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 (less than 6 hours for adult dogs).

While some dog owners are uncomfortable with the idea of crates, when introduced properly, many dogs learn to enjoy resting in their crates even when not home alone.

The crate you choose should be large enough that your dog can stand up and turn around comfortably. Be sure to provide water for your dog – you can purchase hanging bowls or buckets designed for crates. Set up the crate in a quiet area like your bedroom.

*Dogs must be trained to accept a crate.
Don't leave your dog in a crate if they aren't
able to rest in the crate when you're home.*

Follow the training tips on the next page to start your dog's training.

LONG-TERM CONFINEMENT (6+ HOURS)

If you leave for longer than 6 hours, your dog may need to relieve themselves, especially puppies under 1 year, senior dogs, and toy breeds. Your dog will need a space with a bed/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 for small dogs.** Dogs can use a litterbox, too! See the *Housetraining* handout for details.



Exercise pen with room for crate or bed, water, toys, and puppy pad or litterbox.

CONFINEMENT TRAINING STARTS ON YOUR FIRST DAY HOME

Bringing home a new dog is exciting and you'll want to spend time getting to know them. But also use these first days home to get your dog used to being without you. This establishes a routine that makes it easier for your dog the first time you leave the house.

Practice the following steps 2-3 times a day during your first few days home.

STEP 1: Toss a few treats inside the confinement area and leave the door/gate open. Don't force your dog inside. A negative experience can jeopardize your future training success. Instead, give them the freedom to choose to enter and exit on their own at first.

STEP 2: Give your dog a Kong™ stuffed with good stuff (a banana mashed with 1-2 tablespoons of peanut butter and yogurt, canned dog food, etc.) or a long-lasting chew like a bully stick. Shut the door. Sit nearby, reading a book or watching a video at first, and then gradually move further away every few minutes. Once they seem relaxed, release them for more time with you.

Gradually work up to leaving the room, then the house. Smartphones, tablets, or webcams can be helpful for spying on your dog. Start with short absences, then add more time until your dog is comfortable and relaxed being alone for longer periods.

On weekends, holidays, or work-from-home days, have your dog hang out in confinement area every so often. Making this a regular routine in your dog's life makes it much easier at times when they need to be confined.

SEPARATION ANXIETY AND CRATES

If your dog is escaping their confinement areas, barking, howling, or crying when left alone, damaging doors or windows, or injuring themselves when 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. These medications don't "drug the dog," but lower anxiety to a manageable level so you can start a behavior program. It is possible that you will be able to wean your dog off the medication once your dog is comfortable being alone.

For more information, see our handout on Separation Anxiety

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 has, the easier it will be for everyone when it's time to leave!

If your dog is exhibiting signs of separation anxiety, contact our Behavior Helpline for assistance by calling (916) 504-2848 or emailing behavior@sspca.org.
