

# How to Crate Train Your Dog in Nine Easy Steps

*Shannon Sharpe*

We all want a well-behaved dog that doesn't tear things up and goes to the bathroom outside — and [dog crate](#) training is an important part of that. A crate creates a safe environment for your dog and a space that belongs to them.

While many people view crates through the human lens of being “caged up,” dogs are naturally den animals and most enjoy being in small, enclosed places. A crate provides them with a feeling of security, and when trained to use them from an early age, crates can help calm anxiety.

We talked to Anna Flayton, senior dog trainer for PUPS Pet Club in Chicago, for her advice on how to crate train your dog.

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## Step 1: Choose the Right Crate for Your Dog

Finding the [best crate for your dog](#) is key.

“You want to get one that's durable, comfortable, and flexible with whatever training you're doing,” says Flayton. For dogs that prefer to sleep in the dark, she recommends [kennel or airline-style dog crates](#) (which are more enclosed), while [wire dog crates](#) work best for other dogs. It's important, she notes, that you don't buy a crate that is too big for your dog. “Depending on how big your dog is going to get, buy the right crate for their adult size,” she advises. “Then get a divider so you can build the space and grant them more and more space.”

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## Step 2: Establish the Proper Mindset for Crate Training

“The more the dogs associate the crate with a relaxed mindset, the more they'll ultimately enjoy hanging out in there,” says Flayton. If you put the dog in the crate when they're playing, then they'll want to come back out and continue to play. But if you bring them in it when they're calm, they will likely view it as a place of rest. Start by bringing them in for 10 minutes at a time and work your way up from there.

## Step 3: Decide How Your Dog Will Be Comfortable in Their Crate

Some people use [dog beds](#) or towels to create a comfy environment, but that may not always be the best option. Once again, it's trial and error. "Depending on the dog you have, they may tear a dog bed apart or they may use it to pee on," she warns. "It's not a bad thing for them to just sleep on the crate mat itself. Dogs actually do prefer hard surfaces."

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## **Step 4: Reward the Dog After They Go Into the Crate**

Once again, positive association rules. One of Flayton's favorite tricks is giving the dog a [KONG toy](#) filled with peanut butter that she's put in the freezer. "When they're hanging out in the crate, they have something that stimulates them, but they have to work down the frozen peanut butter," she says. It gets the dog used to being in the crate for a longer period of time, while also associating it with an enjoyable activity.

## **Step 5: Keep an Eye on the Time Spent in the Crate**

Your dog needs time outside the crate to play, eat, and use the bathroom. Dogs don't want to soil where they sleep, but if there's too long of a stretch without a walk, they might end up doing so.

## **Step 6: Play Crate Games With Your Dog**

The dog shouldn't see the crate as a negative place. To ensure this, incorporate the crate into fun games where the pup goes in and out of the open crate at their own will. Flayton likes to throw the ball in the crate when playing fetch or hide treats inside for the dog to find.

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## **Step 7: Keep Your Dog "Naked" in the Crate**

"Dogs should never, ever have [dog collars](#) or tags or anything on when they're in the crate," warns Flayton. If the tag gets caught in the crate the dog could strangle.

## **Step 8: Set Your Dog Up for Crate-Training Success**

Once you are ready to give your dog more time inside the crate, do it in small steps. "You don't want to go out to dinner for six hours," cautions Flayton. "Maybe just go get a cup of coffee and come back." She also advises using [a remote dog camera device](#) to determine what your dog does while you're gone. "Are they anxious? Are they pacing? Or are they calm?" she says. "Then you know — and when you come back, you can reward them."

## **Step 9: Be Patient With Crate Training**

Prepare yourself for at least six months of crate training. There will be ups and downs since dogs aren't linear learners, but success will come, says Flayton. "Even when it feels like you're banging your head against a wall, as long as you stay calm and consistent in your methodology, your dog will eventually look for the reward and you'll have the opportunity to reward them."

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## Selecting the Best Dog Crate

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