



Cozy Confinement

At some point after your new dog arrives home, you are going to have to leave him alone, perhaps just to run an errand, perhaps to go to work. As there is no way to predict what your dog will do while you are away, we strongly suggest that you confine him during your absences. Once he proves that he is trustworthy, you can begin allowing him more and more freedom. However, depending on your dog's age and maturity level, you should plan on confining him until you are more familiar with his behavior. Dogs can be confined with a crate, a baby gate or an exercise pen. There are pros and cons to each method.

Using a Crate

Crate training will take some time to introduce to your dog. Crates are portable, easy to clean and for most dogs, the most secure method of confinement. You can put a crate almost anywhere in your home and most dogs accept crates readily (provided you have appropriately introduced your dog to the crate). Crates are available at most pet supply stores; also consider asking friends if they have a crate they are not using any longer. Your dog should be able to comfortably stand and turn around in the crate. He should also be able lie down in a relaxed position (with plenty of leg-room).

Using a Baby Gate

For some dogs, a baby gate will be sufficient to keep them in a certain area; the kitchen is often recommended because the floor is easy to clean. You will need to "puppy-proof" the area each time you leave the dog there (put food away, remove towels or kitchen utensils). Baby gates are inexpensive and available at pet supply stores, baby supply stores and some department stores. Another advantage is that the gates can easily be moved from room to room. Many dogs, however, will jump over a baby gate or simply push through the gate.

Using an Exercise Pen

An exercise pen is like a playpen or a corral for your dog. The sides are wire panels that come in heights from 24-60 inches. There is no top or bottom to the exercise pen, which creates a more open feeling for some dogs. Exercise pens are often good for dogs who have a bad association with being crated, or for owners who would prefer not to use a crate. Similar to baby gates, exercise pens are not always successful means to confine all dogs as they may push out of the pen or knock the pen over.

One popular method of confining a dog has been omitted from this section — we absolutely do not suggest that you confine your dog behind a closed door in your home. Doing so generally leads to an upset, anxious animal who cannot understand why he has been isolated and may actually try to hurt himself trying to get out of the room. Dogs are social creatures who want to be with other family members. The frustration and anxiety caused by being isolated may encourage the dog to chew doors, molding, pull up floor tile, dig up carpet and/or destroy furniture.

Confinement Needs Based on Age

Puppies

A puppy needs an extraordinary amount of supervision to avoid getting into trouble. We strongly recommend crate-training a puppy. Puppies and adult dogs do not want to eliminate in the same area where they sleep, and crating your puppy helps with housebreaking. Crating also keeps your dog safe, and helps your dog learn how to be in your house but not at your side. Baby gates and exercise pens can be very useful when you are at home, but still want to limit the dog's access to other areas of the house.

Adolescent Dogs

An adolescent dog also needs to be confined to areas where he can safely stay during your absence. Young dogs can be active, curious, and may have had very little training prior to being surrendered to the shelter. Until the dog follows basic house rules, allowing him free run of the home can lead to destructive behavior. Giving your dog a safe spot to relax in during the day will keep your dog safe and will give you peace of mind. The method of confinement you choose should be based on your dog's behavior and activity level.

Adult Dogs

Many people choose adult dogs specifically because they may be more calm, housebroken and trustworthy when left alone. Even if you know that your dog was safely allowed free run in his previous home, the shift in environment and routine may upset your dog until he acclimates. If you are adopting a mature dog, we recommend you confine the dog for the first few weeks he is home to evaluate his house manners and self control. Keep in mind that many dogs were crate-trained by their previous owners and may feel more comfortable or secure if confined to a crate or smaller space.