

Puppy May Need a Bigger Crate

Puppies need a large enough crate the help with proper growth and development.

By September Morn

Q. We've had our German Shepherd puppy for two months, and she is about 16 weeks old. We've had very few problems housetraining her, she's caught on fast. My husband and I both work nine hour days, but our schedules and proximity to work allow us to each come home on our lunch breaks. Our puppy is in her crate about eight hours total during work days, with two "potty breaks," as we take lunch about two hours apart from each other.

Sometimes when we get home, the crate will be dry. Other times, there will be a puddle. The crate is the correct size, with just enough room for her to stand, lie down, or turn around.

At first, we attributed the accidents to her age. Obviously, she can't hold it very long and needs to be let out more often than a grown dog. However, she's had no problem making it through the night for more than a month now -- she sleeps in her crate as well.

We are wondering if something that we're doing is provoking this peeing. Could it be separation anxiety? Or could she just think that it is OK to pee in her crate?

A. Separation anxiety would include excessive panting, drooling, vocalizations, and constant attempts to escape, so it doesn't sound like that's the problem. As for your pup thinking it's OK to pee in her crate, well, if she needs to pee before you get home she really has no other choice. She is still quite young and developing bladder control, so potty accidents are to be expected.

It's great you've arranged your lunch schedules so you can go home and give her two potty breaks during the middle of the day. However, even with a couple of breaks, being crated 16 hours of every 24 in a space only large enough to stand up, turn around, and then lie down again with her legs folded is too cramped for a growing puppy.

The size crate you described would be appropriate for nighttime or for safe airline or car travel, when the dog really shouldn't be moving around much. But that size crate is too small for everyday use. Being crated that long on a daily basis prevents even moderate exercise and position changes that are necessary for optimum health and body development. A growing pup needs to be able to get up and walk around, stretch, play, and sprawl out to rest. A travel-sized crate simply does not allow that.

Instead of crating your pup during workdays, a healthier option would be to confine her in a pen or a puppy-proofed room. There should be space for her bed, chew toys, drinking water, plus a spot a few feet from her bed to use as a potty area if she needs to, without soiling the spot where she sleeps.

Crating pups all day was quite popular for a number of years, but now we're realizing it wasn't in their best interests to confine them that closely. Many puppy owners have found that folding exercise pens (available from dog supply stores, catalogs, and websites) meet the needs for safe confinement and also provide a healthier, more comfortable environment for a growing puppy to spend her days in.