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# Keeping a Node.js app running on a VPS with PM2

Node.js, Python & Docker

| CODE | VERSION | COUNTRY · LANGUAGE |
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# Keeping a Node.js app running on a VPS with PM2

Node.js, Python & Docker  Created on **October 10, 2026**  3 min read



If you run `node app.js` in an SSH session, the application dies when the session closes, and does not return if the server reboots. **PM2** is a process manager for Node.js that fixes this: it starts the application in the background, restarts it if it fails, keeps the logs, and brings it back up when the server boots. It is for a **VPS** with root access; on shared hosting, "Setup Node.js App" plays that role (**Node.js in cPanel**).

## Installing and starting

1. **Install Node.js.** Follow the instructions at nodejs.org for your system: the versions in the distribution's repositories are often behind. Check with `node -v`.

2. **Create a user for the application** instead of running it as root, and log in as that user. A compromised application only reaches what that user can reach.

3. **Install PM2:**

```
sudo npm install -g pm2
```

4. **Start the application** from its folder:

```
pm2 start app.js --name my-app
```

If the application starts through a script in `package.json`: `pm2 start npm --name my-app -- start`.

**5** **Check the state and the logs:**

```
pm2 list
pm2 logs my-app
pm2 monit
```

`pm2 logs` is the first place to look when the application goes down.

**6** **Make it survive a server reboot.** Run `pm2 startup`: it prints a line you must copy and run with `sudo`. Then, with the application running, save the list: `pm2 save`. Test it for real by rebooting the VPS.

## Everyday commands

| Command | What it does |
|---|---|
| `pm2 restart my-app` | Stops and starts again. Use it after updating the code. |
| `pm2 reload my-app` | Reloads without cutting the service, when the application allows it. |
| `pm2 stop my-app` | Stops it but keeps it in the list. |
| `pm2 delete my-app` | Removes it from the list. Then run `pm2 save`. |
| `pm2 logs --lines 100` | The last lines of the logs of everything PM2 manages. |
| `pm2 env 0` | The environment variables of process number 0 (the number comes from `pm2 list`). |

For a setup you repeat, PM2 accepts an `ecosystem.config.js` file with the name, the startup file and the variables, started with `pm2 start ecosystem.config.js`. Generate the file with `pm2 ecosystem`.

**Forgot `pm2 save`?**
Without it, PM2 brings back the list it had saved, and the new application is not in it. It is the most common cause of "it worked until I rebooted the server". Another: running PM2 as root but saving the list under another user; `pm2 startup` has to be run for the user who runs the application.

**The application should not be exposed directly.**
Make it listen on `127.0.0.1` and put a proxy with HTTPS in front: **nginx as a reverse proxy**. On an unmanaged VPS, PM2 and the application are yours to maintain: **how far our support goes**.

**If you already use Docker,**

you do not need PM2: Docker itself restarts the container with `restart: unless-stopped`. Pick one of the two for each application, not both. For secrets and variables, see **environment variables and secrets**.

RECOMMENDED

No VPS for the application yet? See the plans and pick the operating system when you order.

**See the VPS servers →**

SEE ALSO

- **Node.js in cPanel: choosing the version and using npm**
- **Ports and firewall on a VPS: why your app is not reachable**
- **First steps with your VPS**

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