

DOG DAY CARE



There is an abundance of dog day care facilities all over the country and, as they become more numerous, choosing the right one for your dog may seem overwhelming. If you do your research, finding the right day care can be a process that is fun for both you and your pup.

Dog day care provides many benefits, including much needed exercise and socialization for your pet. Dogs exposed to multiple environments and many social situations tend to handle new situations more confidently. The right day care facility can prevent dog weight problems, increase the dog's ability to interact positively with other dogs and people, work the dog's mind as well as muscles, enhance the dog's overall wellbeing, and prevent behavior issues. As your dog's caregiver, you may even feel less guilty because you aren't leaving your dog home alone so often.

Is day care right for your dog?

Good candidates for day care are well socialized dogs who enjoy other dogs and seek interaction with them at every opportunity. Young dogs often adjust to the day care environment better than older ones. If your dog is a regular at dog parks and plays and is happy there, then day care is probably ideal for your pet.

However, some dogs are not good candidates for day care and do better at home alone. If your dog is fearful, aggressive, tense or anxious, or if your older dog is happier at home alone, then day care is probably not a good choice. Other unsuitable candidates for dog day care include females in heat, unneutered males, and unvaccinated puppies. Hiring a dog walker, asking friends or neighbors to visit your dog in the middle of the day, coming home at lunch, or taking your dog to a boarding kennel may be better options for you.

You should always take into consideration your dog's age, previous socialization, and breed when considering day care. Here are some examples of what to look for in a day care facility to match your own dog's personality:

🐾 *Seniors*

Older dogs need more rest than active younger dogs and are at risk of being knocked over and/or being injured. Pick a day care that has provisions for such needs; some day cares have a "senior" room or areas a senior dog can find to rest. It is also a good idea to limit the number of days a week an older dog attends so as not to exhaust him/her. While most seniors would probably prefer to stay home, a day care could be beneficial if there is separation anxiety or medical concerns that need to be watched.

🐾 *Puppies up to 1 year old*

Pups benefit from the proper social environment tremendously. Early socialization is very important for all breeds. You want to make sure the day care you choose has the ability to monitor the pups' play and to provide adequate rest when needed. Puppies tucker out quickly and need rest throughout the day. An overtired pup can develop undesirable behaviors. You also want to make sure the day care can provide a quiet spot for your puppy to eat lunch as many young dogs eat 3 times a day, especially the small breeds.

🐾 *Different breeds*

Not all breeds are successful in day care. The same is true for some adult dogs with little to no previous socialization. A day care isn't the place to train your dog to become socialized. Bully breeds and Terriers are most successful in day care when they attend only a couple days a week because they can get exhausted and temperamental and are quick to react to stimulation. Herding dogs do best in a day care that has smaller playgroups; larger groups tend to stress them out as they cannot get control of "their herd." A toy or small breed will benefit from a day care that provides separate play areas for them away from larger dogs. Small dogs and



big dogs can play together just fine but when you get a large mixed group together the smaller dogs are at risk of being stepped on or snapped at, causing unintentional injuries.

Look around and ask questions

Before taking your dog to any day care facility, be prepared to make phone calls and ask questions. Ask to take a tour of the facility. ***If they do not allow tours, do not do business with them.*** Be sure you are comfortable with the facility, as well as their policies and procedures, before leaving your pup in their care.



- ✿ Does the facility have large open areas for the dogs and the ability to group like-sized dogs in separate areas? Separating big, medium and small-sized dogs can prevent accidental injuries to the littler ones.
- ✿ Does the facility look and smell clean?
- ✿ Is the flooring in all play areas wall-to-wall, easy to clean, non-porous and not slick?
- ✿ Is there ample shade and water available throughout the facility?
- ✿ Do the other dogs look happy and healthy?
- ✿ Do the dogs have safe, adequate toys and equipment available? Toys and objects in the play areas can be problematic for dogs which display “possessive aggression,” so it is best if toys are controlled and playtimes with toys are well supervised.
- ✿ Are the indoor and outdoor areas of the facility safe and secure? Make sure that dogs do not have access to doors leading out of the play areas. Outdoor areas should be securely fenced.
- ✿ Does the facility have an evacuation plan in place in case of fire or natural disaster?
- ✿ What is the procedure if a dog is injured or becomes ill during the day?

What about the staff?

The facility should have adequate staff so dogs are not left unattended. The staff should be well-trained so they understand canine body language; it is essential that they can discern whether the dogs are playing or bullying and understand how play styles vary by different breeds. Other concerns include how they discipline dogs, what is done to prevent and end dog fights, and what they do in case of an emergency. Make sure you are comfortable with the staff at the day care you choose and that they are comfortable with the dogs.

Check the rules



Once you have assured yourself the facility has policies and procedures in place to keep your dog safe and happy, the next step is to familiarize yourself with their rules and regulations. Dogs in day care should be current on distemper/parvo combination vaccinations, as well as rabies. Most facilities will not accept puppies that have not had at least two previous vaccinations. Vaccination for bordatella is also required by most day care facilities. The majority of dog day care facilities require dogs to be spayed or neutered. Proof of routine deworming may be requested. Some facilities will recommend monthly treatment for the prevention of lice. Also, remember to take any medications or special food needs your dog may require during his or her stay at the day care facility.

There are many factors that make a positive experience for you and for your dog. Make sure the dog day care facility you choose has the best, safest environment possible for your dog. After all, the day care business you choose will be responsible for the care of your beloved pet in your absence!

Further reading

There are some excellent links on the web. Here are two we can recommend:

ASPCA: <http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/daycare-dogs>

PetMD: <http://www.petmd.com/dog/care/evr dg boarding your dog>