

The trend in American society today seems to be work, work, work, and this requires leaving the loyal family dog at home for extended periods of time. Owners then come home to find a stressed out pooch, rampant destruction, either of the house, or the yard, and neighbors who complain of barking and howling due to separation anxiety. After working your 10 to 12 hours, you then need to exercise your pet—even in inclement weather. You've heard about dog daycare. You're thinking about it, but are you sure it's right for you and your dog? This pamphlet is designed to give some insight into the growing trend of dog daycare facilities and their benefits, to help you decide if daycare is for you and your dog, and to help you choose the best option for your dog's needs.

So what is dog daycare?

It works just like daycare for children. Drop your dog off in the morning on the way to work, and while you slave away, your pampered pooch is pampered indeed! Dog daycare is an organized, controlled and monitored environment, in which a group of friendly dogs, from multiple families, can interact and play throughout the day in an enclosed building or yard. Depending on both your dog's activity level and the curriculum set by the daycare owners, your dog may enjoy the day by playing with other dogs, playing with people, inside or outside, or whiling away the hours ensconced on somebody's couch, getting loving attention. There is a daycare for every kind of dog, and it's important to find one that fits the needs of your dog the best.

How do I know if daycare is right for my dog?

Most dogs that have had prior social experiences with other dogs will enjoy attending daycare. You may not know if your dog is a good fit for daycare until you apply and the facility performs its temperament test.

Professional daycare managers will provide an assessment of your dog's fit to their facility and recommend the best way to integrate them into the routine of the existing pack. Daycare is not a fit for all dogs. Some dogs do fail temperament testing due to aggression that is often fear based. Other dogs pass testing, but exhibit more stress than enjoyment when attending daycare. Some of these issues can be resolved with behavior training, so discuss your dog's needs with the daycare manager.

How much does dog daycare cost?

Costs can vary widely, from a few dollars to \$30 or more a day, depending on the provider and whether the daycare is operated out of a private home or a multi-staffed, full service facility. Some daycares offer pre-pay packages and others are simply pay as you go. Don't select your daycare by cost alone. The lowest priced daycare may not be suitable for your dog.

Facility specifics

A fully staffed facility offers much for a social dog. The number of dogs participating each day at these facilities often ranges from less than 10 to 80 or more, all ready to make friends. Trained staff keeps the dogs busy with indoor or outdoor play, or even, in some cases, happily munching snacks (healthy, of course!) and watching movies made just for the entertainment of dogs. Activities might include "hide and seek", or "tag", or anything that canine minds can come up with. Many facilities provide a variety of toys and balls to enjoy, and some even have swimming pools!

How do I know if the daycare facility is safe for my dog?

When asking questions of potential facilities, confirm that trained staff supervises each playgroup at all

times. Inquire as to how many dogs each staff member supervises. This ratio can vary from as little as 1:10 to as many as 1:20 based on the comfort level of the operator. It will depend on the physical set-up, specific group of dogs at play and the experience level of the staff.

Ask how dogs are separated into playgroups. To minimize risk of injury, dogs should be separated based on play style, size and age. Inquire as to how dog incidents are handled and how many injuries have occurred in the facility. Keep in mind that accidents and injuries can happen in all facilities. Dog daycare is like a child's playground, and by allowing dogs to play together there is a risk of injury. Make sure you are comfortable with the testing process at the facility and their responses regarding handling of dog incidents. Be sure you are comfortable that escape risks are minimal at the facility. You should see multiple doors within the facility to the playrooms and secure high fences around outdoor play yards.

Ask the daycare what their policy is regarding dogs wearing collars during play. If collars are worn, what is their safety plan if dogs' mouths get caught during play? If collars are not worn, how are dogs identified? You'll find that your professional daycare managers are happy to answer all of these questions and explain their safety policies and their reasons for them. Staff is trained to deal with any outbreak of aggression that might result, and most facilities have a standing agreement with a local veterinarian should an emergency arise. In all daycares, dog owners should present proof of current vaccinations, and all should be healthy to prevent the spread of infectious diseases and parasites. Dogs are temperament tested in most cases to ensure the safety of all the canine attendees.

How will I know which daycare is the best one for my dog?

Ask questions. Visit multiple facilities. Talk to the manager and staff, and go with your instincts. Is the environment calm and controlled? Do the dogs seem stressed or happy? Are the staff members interacting with the dogs? If not, they can't know them well enough to detect or avoid trouble. Is the daycare sufficiently staffed? Does the daycare have a screening process? If they don't demand proof of vaccinations from you, they aren't requiring it of anybody else. Does the daycare have a relationship with a vet that is close by? Are there specific strategies in place for handling problems as they arise? Is the daycare a member of ABKA?

How do I find a daycare in my area?

Word of mouth is a great reference. Search the Internet (starting with the ABKA Web site), ask your veterinarian, or check the local yellow pages. Once you find facilities you think you'll like, go visit! The most important factor for choosing a daycare is its suitability for your dog and your instincts about the facility.



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DOG Daycare



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