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# Dog Daycare And Changing Times

## *10 Lessons From Our Dogs*

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By: Susan Briggs

Reflecting back to December 2000 when I co-founded Urban Tails, it's a little hard to believe that dog daycare was a new concept to Houston dog owners. Our biggest challenge was reassuring dog owners that group dog play was safe and would benefit their dog. Fifteen years later as an author, speaker and dog daycare expert, my focus has shifted to educating dog owners about the risks of dog daycare and the importance of making sure it's right for an individual dog.

We chuckled when dog parents referred to their dog's daycare day as being dropped off for school. And it was like school...although it felt like the dogs were usually the teachers who taught us how to best set up the dog daycare environment. Now it is my passion and responsibility to share these lessons with dog daycare professionals and dog owners.

Where do you like to spend your time? Is it a place where you feel comfortable and safe, enjoying an activity that makes you happy? This is what you want when you take your dog to daycare. But how do you know if your dog is really happy?

Dogs communicate enjoyment through their body language. For the past fifteen years, observing thousands of dogs in playgroups, we've learned to recognize when a dog is enjoying, tolerating, or hating something. We've also learned that when dogs are stressed they will not eat or play. You need to choose a dog daycare operated and staffed by



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professionals that speak dog, understand canine body language and honestly shares their observations.

Selecting the right dog daycare provider for your dog is an important decision. Keep the ten lessons learned from the dogs in mind as you evaluate your options. Also ask your provider if they plan to become certified as a professional

pet care provider.

The Professional Animal Care Certification Council has been founded to help pet parents easily find professional pet care providers. Help us recognize the providers that apply these ten lessons by encouraging your providers to become certified when testing becomes available in 2016.

# HOW DO YOU FIND THE DOG DAYCARE ENVIRONMENT THAT IS RIGHT FOR YOUR DOG? HERE ARE TEN LESSONS THAT DOGS HAVE TAUGHT THE DOG DAYCARE EXPERTS:

**1 Structure is Important** – Dogs get bored just hanging out in a large group of dogs. They enjoy participating in a variety of organized games and activities during the day. Quality play sessions include structured activities just like school.

**2 Quality Rest is Required** – It is not natural for dogs to play for 8 – 12 hours a day. An overtired dog is grumpy, less tolerant, and a safety risk in playgroup. When dogs lie down and nap in a large playgroup it's the equivalent of us napping on an airplane. You may shut your eyes, but you don't sleep well. For quality rest, dogs need individual spaces separated from playing dogs. Look for a daycare that provides quality play sessions and formal rest periods.

**3 Small Groups are Preferred** – Dogs separate themselves into small groups of 3 – 5 favorite playmates. To enjoy play in a large group of dogs, a lot of physical space is required so these small groups have room to freely play. Find providers with a lot of physical space or offer small group play options.

**4 Daycare is Not For Every Dog** – It is a myth that all dogs like to play with other dogs. Some people enjoy seeing a movie with a crowd in a theatre and others prefer viewing at home with

family. This analogy applies to our dogs and their interest in dog play. Some dogs enjoy large groups and others prefer just one or two play buddies. It's an individual preference and does not mean anything is wrong with your dog or they need to be fixed if they can't or don't want to go to dog daycare. Just select a different activity for your dog to enjoy at your pet center.

**5 Favorite Games Vary** – Each dog is an individual even within the same breed. Like us, the activities and games they enjoy vary. Select a pet provider that offers a variety of options. Professional pet providers focus on individual dog preferences during the social assessment. Ask for an honest assessment of whether your dog enjoys daycare or prefers another activity.

**6 Mental Activity is Important** – Mental exercise is just as important as physical exercise. Dogs enjoy being challenged mentally so select a provider that uses obedience cues and includes games that prompts your dog to think.

**7 Dogs Like People** – Some dogs enjoy spending time with people more than being with other dogs. Ensure your provider places a priority on staff members engaging and playing with dogs individually.

**8 Knowledgeable Leaders are Preferred** – Our dogs recognize people that understand their language. Be sure your provider has studied body language, stress signals, and recognizes when a dog is uncomfortable. The best dog leaders develop a bond with each dog and know their individual preferences.

**9 Good Manners are Rewarded** – Group dog play should not be a free-for-all of incessant barking, gate crashing and ignoring staff leaders. A quality play session is relatively quiet where dogs learn to wait politely at gates and come when called by staff leaders.

**10 Safety & Fun are Top Priorities** – There are many aspects to operating a safe dog daycare including design of the physical environment and an equal focus on the emotional well-being of each dog. Professional providers also place a priority on ensuring every dog that participates has fun and enjoys off-leash play and is not just tolerating the experience.

## ABOUT SUSAN BRIGGS

Susan was co-founder of Urban Tails and a pioneer of dog daycare operations. She is co-author of *Safe Off-Leash Dog Play: A Complete Guide to Safety and Fun* and co-founder of The Dog Gurus ([www.TheDogGurus.com](http://www.TheDogGurus.com)). In co-founding the Professional Animal Care Certification Council, her mission to keep pets safe continues in the development of a certification program for professional pet care providers ([www.paccert.org](http://www.paccert.org)).