



Doggie daycare is a wonderful outlet for energetic, sociable canines, and a great alternative to sitting at home alone all day! Here's how to choose the right one.

Searching for a doggie daycare for your pooch? The first step is to do some research on local facilities. Choose a place that always puts the dogs' needs and safety first. There's no need to pay for all kinds of extras, but you don't want to skimp on basic care for your companion.

Here are a few things you'll want to check out at each daycare you visit:

- It is essential that managers have training and experience in canine [first aid](#) and health issues, and in basic dog behavior and body language. Don't be afraid to ask. Staff should be trained to recognize health issues like heat exhaustion, how to help a dog in respiratory distress, and to safely separate dogs who are not interacting well in order to avoid serious injury. Also ask what veterinary clinic they use for emergencies.
- Ask to tour the facility. Look for cleanliness, organization, and how employees interact with the dogs. It is important that the daycare play space is set up for easy cleanup of urine and feces to avoid any health issues. We all know "stuff happens", but removing it quickly and doing daily disinfection is important.
- Ask how many dogs play in each group and get the ratio between employees watching each group and the individual dogs in that group. It should be no fewer than one person per eight to ten dogs.
- Ask how the staff decides which dogs are in which playgroups. Are they separated by breed, activity level and/or play style? Where do they think your dog will do best? Are you comfortable with their decision and reasoning?
- Ask about the daily schedule. How long is each play period? How long (and when) are the breaks? There should be rest periods for dogs to cool off, warm up, or calm down, depending on the weather and the size of the play group.
- You might also want to ask if the facility offers boarding. If so, is there someone on site 24/7? If your dog likes daycare, being able to board him at the same location will make your vacations less stressful for both of you.
- Once you've decided on a facility, be sure to give the staff accurate contact information and update it frequently. You would be devastated to find you missed an emergency call because you forgot to update your latest office or cell phone number.

- Some time after your dog begins attending daycare, stop by unannounced one day to say hello and ask how he's doing.

His first day

On your dog's first day at doggie daycare, I recommend feeding him a light breakfast. Though dogs need energy to play, it may be a somewhat stressful day for him (remember your first day at school?). Lighter meals may avoid tummy distress. Ask, though, if you can bring a snack for the staff to give him during a rest period.

Unless your dog is boarding, you don't need to send toys along with him. Most daycares don't allow toys in play areas because they can sometimes lead to disagreements between dogs.

Keep in touch with the staff. Ask how your dog is interacting with the others, what his activity levels are like, and if they've noticed any unusual behavior. If he should receive a "bad report card", ask for all the details. Not all dogs have the right temperament for daycare, so you'll need all the information you can get to decide whether or not to continue or change your dog's attendance.

Size matters

If you have a small dog, you should know that more than a 50% size difference in dogs can lead to serious issues with predatory drift – an instinctive situation in which a small dog suddenly seems like prey to a larger dog. A good daycare will avoid such problems by setting up separate play spaces safe for all sizes and play styles.

If all goes well, you'll enjoy one of the best benefits of doggie daycare – a tired, happy dog at the end of the day!