



Dog Behaviour Guide

Selecting a Dog Walker or Daycare



Finding the right caregiver for your dog when you're at work, on vacation, or to help you out when needed can be overwhelming. This guide offers you useful tips for choosing the right dog daycare or walker.

Our Position on Training

The Edmonton Humane Society supports humane training and care of dogs, which means using treats, toys, and praise to reward desired behaviours and redirecting or ignoring the behaviours you don't want, rather than using aversive methods to stop the behaviour.

When considering your pet's caregiver, look for individuals that utilize reward-based training, which motivates through positive reinforcement and improves your bond with your pet. Caregivers must value safety, be transparent in their practices, and structure their services to minimize fear, anxiety and stress in the dogs they look after.

Dog Daycares

Dog daycares are staffed facilities where people bring their dogs to spend a half or full day in a group setting with other dogs. Each facility is different, so research what the dog to people ratio is per group, if they separate dogs into groups based on size and temperament, how the day is structured, and the amenities and spaces the dogs spend time in. Some daycares offer boarding, training, and grooming services and may even provide boarding services for multiple kinds of animals.

Dog Walkers

Typically, dog walkers operate independently and not out of a facility. Instead, they come to your home to take your dog out for a walk. Dog walkers can vary in their professional representation and designation. Many find clients through personal referrals or individual websites, and some are employees of a dog-walking or pet care service company, where walking is their primary job or part-time job.

When hiring a dog walking service, it may not always be the same person walking your dog. The number of dogs on a walk at a time, how long walks are, the goal of each walk and the amount of on- or off-leash time your dog may be different depending on the walker's routine or who is walking.

It is important to keep in mind when selecting a daycare or walker that every company is different and currently, there is no regulation for dog daycares or dog walkers. Ensuring you thoroughly research your dog's potential caretakers will help you feel confident about who you've chosen left your canine with.



Questions to ask yourself first

1. Will your dog enjoy daycare?

First, consider what setting is right for your dog.

- How social is your dog? Do they truly *enjoy* the company of other dogs, or do they *tolerate* it?
- Would they prefer a vigorous hour-long walk at a set time each day, followed by quiet time alone or would they prefer being surrounded by other dogs all day?

Daycare isn't for every dog, much like parties aren't for all humans. Some signs your dog could enjoy daycare include voluntarily playing with a variety of dogs and play styles, being proficient in canine-to-canine communication, and having a play style that doesn't excessively arouse or stress other dogs. If you're unsure if daycare is right for your dog, the daycare should let you know what they think during your dog's initial assessment.

2. What do you expect to achieve from utilizing a dog daycare or a dog walker?

Attending daycare or using a dog walker doesn't guarantee your dog will get appropriately delivered socialization or that they'll return home tired or more well-behaved.

3. Are there any medical or behavioural reasons why your dog might require extra care or that would make them more suited for one environment over another?

For example, if your pet requires regular medication, shows resource guarding against other dogs, is reactive on leash, or is fearful of strangers, selecting an experienced care provider capable of handling these concerns is important.

Note: Socialization is more than exposing your dog to something to get them to like it. Meaningful socialization involves creating positive associations during exposure through high-value rewards.

If your dog is fearful, reactive, or shows behaviours you would like to change, you may benefit from utilizing a trainer to help you coach your pet towards more desired emotions and behaviour.



Questions to ask potential providers

1. What are the drop-off and pick-up hours?

2. If transportation is provided, how are animals transported (carrier and securing methods) and how are the dogs separated during transport?

If dogs are transported in a vehicle, ask how they're contained and ask to see the vehicle to ensure your pet's safety during transport.

3. Is the service provider licensed, insured and bonded?

If the provider offers services through a company or platform, they should have insurance and policies in place. If they are independent, they may not have insurance or policies. The level of formality and insurance varies, so evaluate your risk tolerance when selecting a provider.

4. How are staff trained? What kind of experience do they have and are there references available?

If the provider has certification, research what the designation means, where it's from, and what they did to earn that designation. Individuals working at a facility monitoring dogs must be skilled at reading body language to prevent conflict between dogs and ensure safety.

5. How much communication can you expect and how will concerns be communicated to you?

Some service providers have live cameras, while others send you a report at the end of the day to let you know how your dog's day went. If there are any concerns with your dog, it's good to establish when you'll be notified and how much detail is given.

6. Are there accommodations or procedures to help your dog adjust if they aren't doing well, and are you comfortable with the methods that will be used?

7. Is there an initial assessment required and what does that look like?

*Daycares should always conduct an assessment **before** your enrollment to evaluate if your dog is a good fit. Screening helps identify if your dog will enjoy their experience and if they will be safe around other dogs (if applicable).*

After the assessment the facility will tell you how your dog did and if they have any accommodations or suggestions that could benefit your dog. Dog walkers may conduct a more informal assessment.

8. Are there vaccination and spay/neuter requirements?

9. What is the ratio of dogs to people? What is the maximum ratio or number of dogs at a given time?

- a. For daycares: How many staff per dog? If dogs are separated into different groups, how many people supervise per group?

There should be emphasis on quality over quantity in a daycare. Dogs should spend time in an appropriately sized and matched group and be allowed to take breaks and relax away from group play. Multiple people should be present per group for safety.



- b. For walkers: Are multiple dogs walked by the same person, and what equipment is used to walk them? Are there ever multiple dog walkers on a walk? Are the dogs ever off-leash?

*We recommend using dog walkers who **won't** walk multiple dogs on leash at the same time. The combination of a tight cluster of dogs being handled by a single person can be potentially dangerous for the dogs, walkers or other people and animals they encounter. It may also stress dogs out and can prevent them from doing satisfying activities like sniffing on walks. We recommend reading this additional [resource for more information about group walks](#).*

If dog walkers allow dogs off-leash, ask where they are taken off-leash and how they ensure dogs are properly monitored and managed. Be mindful of their responses to ensure they are in designated off-leash areas and are prepared to handle the interactions with other people and animals that your dog may encounter.

10. For facilities or individuals who manage multiple animals, what kind of dogs do they group together and how they determine the groups?

Dogs who are compatible in size, energy level, and play style are best grouped together. Your dog should have safe and rewarding interactions with minimal stress, and the facility should have accommodations if your dog isn't enjoying their experience.

11. What is the typical routine in daycare or on walks?

Some daycares have a structured routine like dedicated play and naptimes, while others may not. Some may include time dedicated to enrichment and mental stimulation versus only having free play throughout the day.

With dog walkers, the routine may vary or be consistent per walk. Variables could include the person walking your dog, the location of walks, the length of walks, the number of dogs present, and being on- or off-leash.

12. Will equipment or tools will be used on the dogs?

*Sometimes providers may require the use of certain collars or harnesses to prevent escapes or place GPS tracking collars on dogs. **Avoid** providers that use aversive tools to manage undesirable behaviours (e.g., an electronic or bark collar to stop barking.) Ensure you understand what equipment is used, how it works, when it will be used, and consent to their use.*

13. Are you able to see the facility or observe your dog with the dog walker?

***Daycares:** Facilities may not allow tours or viewing while the daycare is running to maintain routine for the dogs in daycare and is not necessarily a reason for concern. They may have alternatives such as after-hours tours, virtual tours, or live video feeds. Look at the facility layout, size, cleanliness, if fences are secure, and other safety features. Ask if you can observe the daycare while it's operating or see a live feed to watch how the staff manages dogs, and how the space is utilized.*

***Walkers:** Being able to introduce them to your dog and go on a brief walk can give you valuable information about how your dog will be handled. Watch how your dog responds to the person, how the walker puts on walking gear, if they can appropriately handle your dog, and how they respond to concerns like pulling or reactivity.*



14. If additional services like boarding, training, or grooming are offered who provides these services and what are their qualifications? Are there any details you can confirm before using those services?

If your provider claims certification through an agency or school, research the accreditation body to understand the qualification and validate their credentials. Some organizations have a page on their website where you can search by individual or business to confirm their certification.

If considering an overnight boarding service, confirm if dogs are left alone overnight, how they are housed and monitored in case of any concerns, and what their notification process looks like should your pet need emergency care.

Did You Know?

You can also ask us behaviour questions by emailing:
askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com

It takes approximately \$7 million to keep the Edmonton Humane Society operational for one year and 40% of these funds come from generous donations made by supporters like you. Please consider [Donating](#).