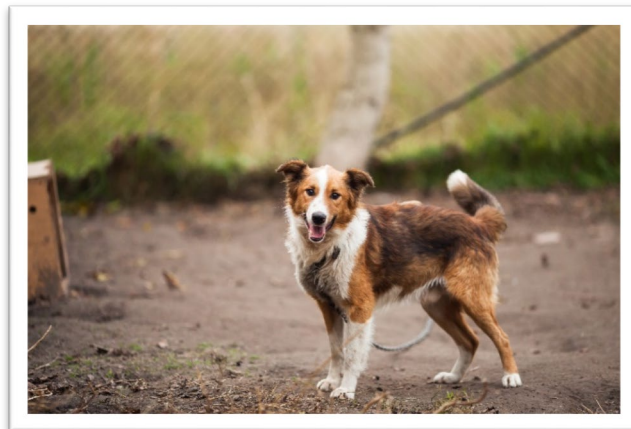


Deciding on the Right Service for your Dog

Boarding Kennel or Pet Sitter?

Pet owners searching for a suitable boarding kennel to care for their pets while they are away from their homes can be faced with a bewildering array of choices. There are a number of different types of boarding options for dogs, and it's important to look beyond a shiny website to determine the best service for your pet. Not all dogs do well at traditional boarding facilities and may do better staying with a local pet sitter who takes in one or a few dogs at a time to live in their home. Conversely, some dogs – especially those dogs that are not the most dog social of pooches – will do better in a kennel environment with their own dedicated living space and run. Some dogs tend to do better in their own home with a pet sitter who moves in to stay with them in their own environment.



The following information will provide an overview of how to choose the right boarding facility for your pet, how to prepare for the boarding experience, and some resources on how to find boarding facilities.

What's Best for My Dog?

Different dogs have different needs. Before choosing what type of service your dog is best suited to, it's important to itemize a few things about your dog's personality to help decide. Ask yourself questions such as:

- Is my dog fearful of new people?
- Is my dog fearful in new places?
- Is my dog aggressive towards people or other dogs?
- Is my dog very social and loves people?
- Does my dog have a history of separation anxiety or isolation distress?
- Has my dog ever bitten another person or animal?

An easy way to decide on the best option is to think about what kind of situation would make your dog the happiest. If your dog is fearful, anxious or does not deal with new environments well, it makes sense to have someone stay at your home while you are away. If your dog loves to go on adventures and is social toward other dogs and people, an in-home boarding solution in a pet sitter's home where there are other dogs and frequent outings might be ideal. If your dog has behavioural issues such as acute fearfulness or aggression towards unknown people or dogs, a boarding facility where the dog enjoys his/her own kennel may be the best solution.

Most boarding facilities and in-home dog sitters will have a comprehensive questionnaire that you will fill out to provide them with information about your dog which will help them also determine if your dog will be successful in their environment. Many ethical and reputable dog sitters and facilities will be happy to provide suggestions or recommendations for other services or service providers if they feel their environment will not be one in which your dog can stay relatively stress free.

Choosing Your Pet Sitter or Boarding Facility

Now that you've narrowed down the type of service that is best for your dog it's time to decide which facility or service you will hire. Here are some checklist items to consider before signing on the dotted line and dropping off your pet for their stay:

Commercial Boarding Facility

In an article for Whole Dog Journal, Nancy Tucker, CPDT-KA, lists a number of check list items for owners to have in mind when choosing a commercial boarding facility. The below list draws from her recommendations.



1. How Clean is the Facility?

It's a good idea to call ahead and ask to book an appointment to tour the facility. Reputable boarding kennels will be happy to show you around, but there may be specific times that they book those appointments so as to not interfere with enrichment times, quiet times or feeding times for the dogs in their care. A good facility will have a schedule for care for their boarders, and you won't want to disrupt that by showing up unannounced and causing undue stress to the dogs staying there.

While touring the facility, make note of cleanliness. Does it look and smell clean? Is it well ventilated? Is it heated or air-conditioned?

2. Is Drinking Water Readily Available? Dogs should always have readily available drinking water. Some boarding operators may withhold water during certain times of the day to reduce or control the number of bio breaks a dog might need and to prevent urination in kennels. This is a red flag and dogs should have access to clean drinking water at all times. The only exception to this rule is if a dog is prone to bloat and a veterinary professional has advised to withhold water immediately before or after eating, so if you see a particular dog without water don't jump to conclusions but ask if there is a medical reason that dog does not have water available.

3. Does Each Dog Have Free Access to a Private Outdoor Run? If Not, How Often Does the Dog Receive Out of Kennel Walks or Enrichment? Depending on the design of the facility, some indoor kennel runs have a doggie-door that leads to an outdoor run and can be left open during the day (climate permitting), allowing the dog to move in and out as he pleases.

If there is no doggie-door, ask how often the dog is taken out of his enclosure during the day, and for how long. Does he just get to pee and then is returned immediately to his kennel? Or does he get to sniff around a bit, or go for a walk? Is there off leash time in an enclosed park? Ask how many out of kennel outings dogs in care receive and make sure that is acceptable to you. As a rule of thumb, your dog should be out of his kennel a minimum of 3 times for bio breaks, with a least one longer walk or off leash run in an enclosed area. Outings should be timed in such a way to ensure the dog does not endure long waits between necessary biological functions.

4. What is the Staff to Dogs Ratio? Ask how many staff are in the facility at any given time and ask what their capacity for care numbers are (the number of dogs they will take in to maximize the use of their housing). Since

you have already asked how many outings and enrichment minutes dogs in care receive, do the math to determine if those enrichment minutes are achievable with the number of staff in the facility.

5. Do dogs in care receive private or solo dog walks and/or park time or does the kennel carry out playgroups with multiple dogs? If the kennel carries out playgroups, how do they determine what dogs to put together? Are dogs temperament screened for suitability for playgroups? How many dogs are in any given playgroup at one time? What is the handler to dog ratio? Do the staff leading the playgroups have any formal training in leading playgroups? How are the dogs introduced to each other and what happens if dogs in a playgroup start to fight? Facilities that provide off leash playgroups should have playgroup leaders on staff who have formal training in dog body language and play styles, how to introduce dogs and how to prevent or break up dog fights in a safe and humane manner. If you are uncomfortable with your dog participating in playgroups, will the facility provide your dog with solo outings and is there a surcharge (which is not unreasonable) for that service?

Safety and Security: How secure is the facility? Are there double entry points for safety to prevent a dog from bolting out an open door should it slip its leash or somehow escape from its kennel? Do kennel doors latch securely? What do staff do in the event that a dog escapes his kennel or cage? If a dog gets outside the main doors somehow, how is the dog recovered?



6. What Separates the Enclosures and how high are the walls? The construction of the kennels is important and ideally, solid walls separate enclosures. Some kennels may simply have chain link fencing with canvas or vinyl tarp covering the fencing which is less ideal but may still be adequate depending on the dog. Many dogs experience stress in a kennel environment and the immediate visual presence of another dog will escalate stress levels and barrier frustration so kennels should incorporate methods to reduce sight lines. Dogs should never be able to make physical contact between enclosures. Dogs who are highly stressed in the presence of other dogs should be housed in kennels with solid walls separating kennels. The height of the walls is also important. Some dogs can jump quite high, so are the walls high enough to prevent animals from jumping over walls to escape their kennels?

7. What Happens if Your Dog Has a Health Emergency? You'll want to ensure that the person or people taking care of your dog know what to do in a medical emergency. Are staff members certified in pet first aid? Is there transportation available at all times to take your dog to the vet in case of an emergency? Ultimately, you will also have established in writing what medical decisions the kennel operator can make on your behalf, and which ones must be made by you.
8. If the kennel operates playgroups or buddy walks, will my wishes be respected if I wish to limit interactions with other dogs? Some dogs, are best kept apart from other dogs for various reasons. They may be fearful or aggressive around other dogs, or they might not be physically well enough to engage in direct contact (like if they're elderly, injured, or recovering from surgery). Does the kennel employ enough staff to provide my dog with solo outings and enrichment?
9. Handling Philosophy and Staff Training: What kind of training have staff members received? Are they qualified to read dog body language to recognize stress, discomfort, or volatile situations? What kind of handling skills do they have? What handling philosophy does the kennel adhere to? Reputable kennels follow a LIMA - Least Intrusive, Minimally Aversive approach – which is an industry accepted and competence based strategy to manage and effect behaviour change (for more information, please refer to the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants position statement which can be found here: <https://m.iaabc.org/about/lima/>). To determine handling and management strategies, ask what exactly will happen to your dog if he barks excessively. Will they spray him with water? Will they use a special collar of any type to try to control the barking? What exactly do they do about barking dogs? Ask them to be specific. Any type of "correction" is unacceptable.

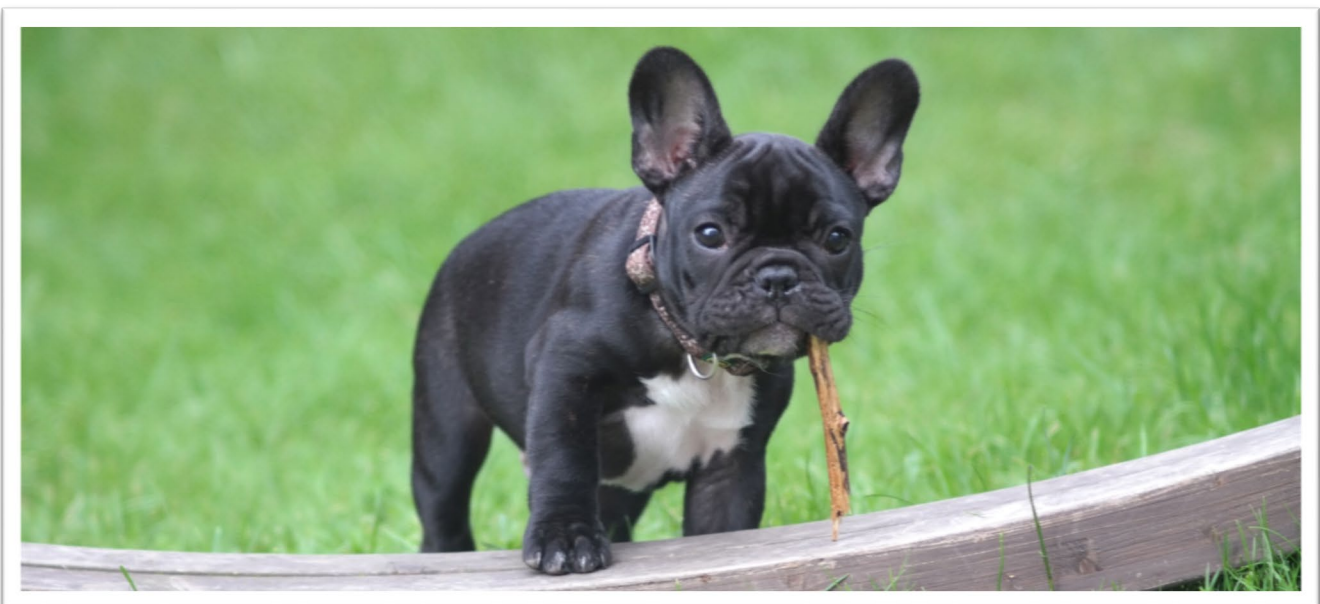
You can also ask what the staff would do about a dog who growls at staff members or at another dog. Staff members should be qualified enough to recognize that a growling dog in an unfamiliar environment is most likely expressing fear or discomfort. Measures should be taken to help the dog feel more at ease. As with barking, any type of "correction" for growling is also unacceptable. In any given scenario, your dog should be handled with kindness and patience. Ask specifically if staff members apply any physical corrections that are meant to startle or frighten your dog (like poking, jerking on the leash, "alpha rolling," pinning your dog to the ground, shouting, etc.) or tools that are meant to be aversive to your dog, such as choke, prong, or collars that emit a shock, vibration, or citronella. None of these handling methods or tools are acceptable, and no qualified kennel operator who is knowledgeable about dog behavior would use them to manage the dogs in their care.

10. Does the facility hold a commercial boarding license (if required by your municipality) and hold appropriate boarding insurance? These are important considerations when choosing a commercial boarding facility. Pet care providers hold insurance and various city by-laws restrict zoning for commercial boarding establishments. Ensure the facility you hire is fully licensed and insured.
11. What are the Kennel's Health Requirements?
Most kennels will require that your dog's vaccinations are "up-to-date," but you'll want to find out what they mean by this and exactly what vaccinations they require. No matter what your personal feelings might be towards immunization protocols, you'll probably need to meet the boarding facility's requirements in order to use their services. At a minimum, your dog should be up to date on the following (source: zoetis.com):

- a) DAPP (a.k.a. DHPP) vaccine. This combination vaccine protects dogs against Distemper, Adenovirus type 1 (Hepatitis), Adenovirus type 2 (respiratory), Parainfluenza and Parvovirus. After the initial series, your dog will still need periodic boosters, with the frequency being determined by your veterinarian and based on your dog's age, lifestyle, and other risk factors. If your dog is due for a booster, it should ideally be done at least 3 weeks before their stay at a kennel to allow them to build up the best immunity prior to boarding.
- b) Rabies vaccine. The rabies vaccine is required every 1 or 3 years, depending on governing laws in your municipality or province.

As well, some kennels may require the following:

- a) Leptospirosis vaccine. This vaccine helps protect dogs from Leptospirosis. This bacterial infection can destroy the kidneys and/or liver. It's sometimes given in conjunction with the DAPP vaccine, but can also be given on its own. Yearly boosters are then necessary to ensure the best level of protection.
- b) Bordetella (formerly called canine kennel cough) vaccine. The Bordetella vaccine is very important when your dog is being boarded or attends doggie daycare. The vaccine needs to be given at least one week before their stay and boarding facilities require this vaccine to be given once a year at minimum (but some require a 6-month vaccine schedule because of the prevalence of Bordetella).
- c) Canine influenza virus (dog flu) vaccine. For dogs that are often around other dogs (such as at boarding kennels, dog shows, or daycare), protecting them against canine influenza (CIV) is very important. Infection rates are high for dogs that are exposed to the virus and dogs can get very sick from CIV. After the initial series, your dog should receive this vaccine every year, and it ideally needs to be completed at least 2 weeks prior to being boarded.
- d) Parasite prevention: Year-round parasite prevention is important as well — you don't want your dog bringing home any fleas or ticks or getting diseases these parasites transmit. Ensure that your dog is on a prevention program that covers them for external parasites like fleas and ticks, as well as internal parasites like heartworm and intestinal worms. A good boarding kennel will require all of the animals in their care to be on continuous parasite prevention.



12. How is Feeding Handled?

Find out if the kennel staff is willing and able to maintain the diet you specified for your dog. Will they honor your instructions to refrain from feeding a particular food item to your dog if your dog has diet restrictions? If you bring a week's worth of your dog's special treats, will they arrange to give them as requested? If you feed raw, does the kennel have fridges available to store your food? Are they willing to accommodate home-cooked and able to store it safely if that is your dog's regular diet?

13. Is There a Night Shift?

Many boarding facilities have a night shift person or video equipment to monitor animals at night. Does the facility have an appropriate emergency alert and response plan in place if animals are alone at night?

14. Does the facility come highly recommended?

In the end, a boarding facility's reputation says a lot about its operation. Don't rely on advertising or a great-looking website. Get references from people who use their services. Ask local vet clinic staff about them. Most facilities are happy to provide some client references you can contact.

Choosing an In-Home Boarding Service

Some pets will be more comfortable staying in a home with a pet sitter. Many of the above questions are applicable when choosing an in-home pet sitter but keep in mind that your service provider does not operate a commercial or store front facility so asking for a "tour of the facility" will likely be an imposition. However, it is reasonable to ask to meet the provider in their home, where you will get a sense of the suitability of the environment for your pet. As a matter of fact, knowledgeable pet sitters will insist on meeting your dog, and some even require a try-out night to be sure your dog will be comfortable for a longer term stay.

Here are some important considerations when choosing to board your dog at someone's home:

1. By-Law limitations on animals in a private residence.
How many animals will be in the home at one time? Is it a reasonable amount of animals for one person to care for, and do the municipalities By-Laws allow for that number of animals?
2. Where will my dog stay? Will my dog be limited to a single area or have run of the house? Where will my dog sleep?
3. Safeguarding against escape: If my dog will have run of the house, is the home set up in such a way with safeguards to prevent my dog from bolting out of the door?
4. Enrichment time: Does my pet sitter work a full time job? If so, how many outings will my dog have each day? Are these outings walks, dog park visits or simply time in the back yard?
5. Emergency protocols: Does the caregiver have emergency protocols in place for illness, injury or escape? Does the caregiver have kennels available and transportation available to transport my dog to a vet if necessary? Ask the pet sitter if any dogs in their care have sustained significant injuries or have escaped in the past. How were these emergency situations handled? Is there a formal emergency and disaster response plan in place?
6. Cleanliness: As with a commercial boarding facility, cleanliness counts. Does the home look and smell clean? If my dog has an accident in the home, how is that handled? Will my dog be punished?
7. Children: Is my dog used to children if the pet sitter has kids? Are the pet sitters children used to being around dogs and will they interact safely with my dog?

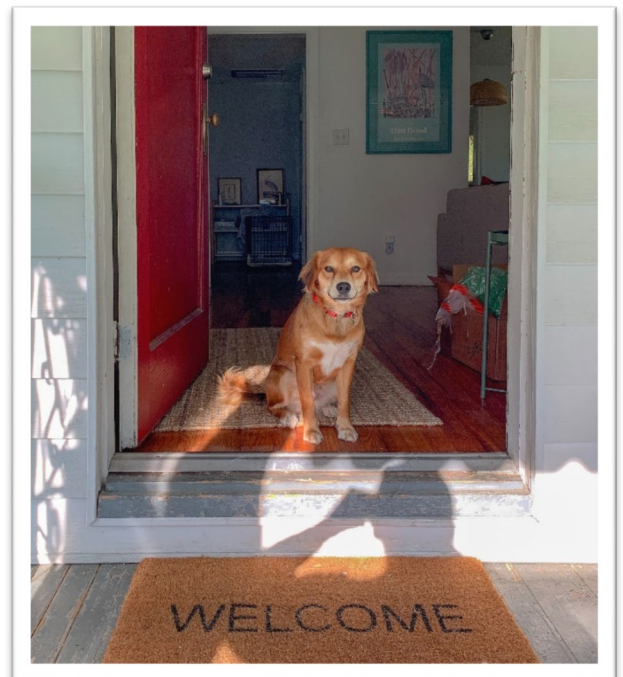
8. Resident dog: Does my pet sitter have a resident dog, and is that dog friendly towards my dog? Often, pet sitters will arrange for greetings with family pets outside of the home first to allow the dogs to greet on neutral ground or in the yard and prevent territorial behaviour from the family dog. If the dogs appear uncomfortable, will the pet sitter arrange for the pets to be separated by gates or x-pens for safe interactions?
9. Insurance: Does my pet sitter carry insurance?
10. Handling: Does my pet sitter have any formal animal behaviour or training knowledge? Will my dog be handled with kindness? Is my pet sitter equipped to deal with any behavioural issues my dog may have? Please refer to IAABC position statement on LIMA, which can be found here: : <https://m.iaabc.org/about/lima/>.
11. Feeding: Does the pet sitter demonstrate knowledge surrounding safe practices for feeding multiple dogs in their home? At the very least, dogs should be separated when fed, with barriers ideally. Pet sitters that vaguely suggest that the dogs can all eat from the same bowl, or who leave food out for animals to free feed should be avoided. Is clean water available at all times? As with the commercial boarding kennel section above, water rationing to prevent accidents in the home should be a red flag unless a medical professional has advised water rationing for a specific medical condition.
12. Questionnaire: A knowledgeable pet sitter will have a formal questionnaire to go through with you to determine if there are any special needs or behavioural concerns they need to be aware of to care for your pet safely. Expect questions surrounding how your dog is with strangers, other dogs, other animals, and if your dog has ever bitten anyone. Answer truthfully as many pet sitters are equipped with great management strategies to ensure your dog is kept stress free and under threshold. You can also expect detailed questions about your pet's health, including instructions surrounding any medication, and your pet's current vaccination status. As with commercial boarding kennels, your pet sitter may have specific vaccination and parasite control requirements that must be met prior to boarding your pet.

Finally, and this is a reoccurring theme throughout this document, be sure to leave yourself plenty of time to find your pet sitter and be sure to check references. Satisfied and happy former or current clients value their pet sitters highly and will be very happy to provide you with references. If a pet sitter can't provide you with the phone numbers or email addresses of a few clients, that should act as a red flag.

Choosing a Pet Sitter to Stay at Your Home

Companies like Rover, Wag or many local small pet care businesses can match you with a pet sitter who will stay in your home while you are away to care for your pet. For many, this is an ideal scenario, but as with other services, the level of professionalism or knowledge that the sitter holds will need to be determined prior to hiring that sitter. As with any other type of service, there are great pet sitters who invest in education or keep up to date with current best practices but there are also those who may not approach the job with the same level of preparedness or professionalism. Interview your candidates carefully to determine if they are the right fit for you.

Book a meet and greet with your sitter to have them over to your home. Experienced pet sitters will come armed with a number of questions about the care your pet needs, their routines, their



feeding schedule, any health concerns and any behavioural concerns they need to know about. They should also be insured and bonded.

It's very reasonable for you to have a number of questions as well, and to lay out what your expectations for care are. Communication about exactly what service you need and what service the caregiver provides is an essential tool of business so don't be shy to let the pet sitter know you're your needs are.

Along with many of the questions outlined in the above section (Choosing an In Home Boarding Service), lay out your guidelines and expectations for the care of your home and your dog. Be reasonable, of course, but communicate clearly if there are restrictions on having visitors over or if there are any special rules surrounding the house stay. Provide clear written instructions for the care of your dog and be sure to list where food, brushes, toys, leashes, jackets and medication (if relevant) are kept. If your dog requires medication, be sure to write out exact instructions on how to dose the dog and how often. Make sure the sitter is comfortable doing so prior to hiring that sitter – often it's a good idea to address this on your initial phone call or email to determine if a meet and greet is to be scheduled or not with this sitter. There is no sense in arranging to meet someone who does not as part of their service provide pilling or other in-home medical care.

Be sure to let your sitter know if other service providers will be entering the home while you are away (such as a cleaning service) and be sure to provide your pet sitter with your contact information while away as well as an emergency contact information number and your vet information, including vaccination records. It is a good idea to call your vet in advance to let them know that someone will be staying with your cat while you are away so they have that person's name on file in case of illness or injury that requires a vet visit in your absence. Your vet office will likely also ask for a credit card number to retain on file as well.

As with every other pet sitting or boarding option, checking references is imperative. Don't simply rely on a couple of Yelp reviews, obtain the phone numbers of former clients and call them.

Doing a bit of research in advance (and leaving yourself enough time to do so) can make the difference between a great and stress free experience for you and your dog and one that is not so great. Once you have found a pet sitter that works for you, you will likely return to that service each time you need care for your pet so the advanced research into finding the right solution will provide peace of mind and stability for your pet for future trips. It is definitely time well spent.