



EVALUATING PROFESSIONAL DOG WALKERS

Dogs need lots of physical and mental stimulation. If you're not home to give your dog regular daily exercise and outings, a dog walking service may be a good choice for you. The person you hire to walk your dog should have composure, sincerity of purpose, presence, and playfulness.



The following questionnaire is intended to help you evaluate a potential dog walker. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Rather, the questions are meant to inform you of the dog walker's practices--how your dog will be treated and what actions the walker will take if specific behavior issues or emergencies arise.

(The San Francisco SPCA endorses non-aversive, positive-reinforcement methods of dog training and behavior modification. For more on positive-reinforcement training, read *The Culture Clash*, by Jean Donaldson, director of the SF/SPCA Academy for Dog Trainers, or call the SF/SPCA Behavior Help Line, 415-554-3075, for referrals to positive-reinforcement trainers.)

Maintain a regular dialogue with your dog walker. Ask for observations regarding your dog's general behavior and experiences on the walk. If the dog walking service you choose has employees, you may want to check their references and meet them before they walk your dog.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR DOG WALKERS

1. Where will you take my dog?
2. In what types of activities do the dogs engage? Do you walk the dogs off or on leash, or is the outing a supervised playgroup in a designated location?
3. For how long will you exercise my dog (excluding car time)?
4. Do you include obedience during the walk? If so, how?
5. What sort of punishments and/or rewards do you use?

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6. What will you do if my dog . . .

Does not come when called?

Does not sit when requested?

Jumps on you?

Jumps on somebody else?

Growls at another dog?

Growls at a person?

7. Do you consult with a professional dog trainer? If so, who? What is your philosophy on keeping dogs under control?

8. What is the maximum number of dogs you will walk on an outing? Do you separate dogs according to size? Age? Activity level?

9. What is the protocol for introducing my dog into the group? For letting my dog off leash? How do you screen dogs for dog friendliness?

10. Will you provide any reports/updates on my dogs' behavior either weekly or monthly?

11. In an emergency, what plan of action do you have in place? Are you trained in pet first aid or CPR?

12. Has a dog ever been lost or injured on your walks? What happened?

13. Will walks be delegated to anyone other than yourself (an assistant or associate)? If so, how far in advance of the actual outing with my dog?

14. How long have you been walking dogs professionally? Were you trained to manage multiple dogs? If so, where or by whom?

15. Can you provide references from current and former clients? May I contact them?

16. May I observe/accompany you on a walk?

Questionnaire courtesy of The Dog's Mind: Enhancing the human-dog relationship and the quality of life for dogs everywhere; written by Fawn Pierre, an instructor at the SF/SPCA Academy for Dog Trainers and a Sirius puppy trainer since 1994.

If you would like more information on how to select a dog walker, email The Dog's Mind, thedogsmind@mindspring.com.