

Hiring a Dog Walker



Here are some questions to ask when hiring a dog walker, followed by the response you should expect.

Are you licensed, bonded and insured?

Yes, and they can provide proof as such.

Are you certified in Pet First Aid & CPR? If so, when did you last take it?

Yes! Ask when they took the course and with whom. Look for classes that provided practical hands-on experience on dog models.

What is your experience/what training do you have?

Look for someone whose passion in life is dogs and their care! Someone who has perhaps volunteered extensively at their local shelter or attended classes at reputable institutions (be wary of online courses).

What's the maximum number of dogs you walk at one time?

No more than 6-8. (Make sure their answer is in accordance with local law)

How do you transport animals?

Each animal rides in his/her own individual crate.

What locations do you frequent with your walking groups?

Make sure these are dog-friendly areas that allow on/off leash walks. Tip: Write these areas down so that should an emergency arise, you know where your dog might be.

Do you do on-leash or off-leash walks?

Choose the option that is best for your dog. If your dog has anything less than a 90-100% solid recall they should not be part of the off-leash group.

How do you choose your walking groups?

Groups should be based on compatible size, age and temperament of dogs.

What would you do if a fight breaks out?

The walker has water to pour (not spray with a spray gun) on the dogs to separate, or uses some sort of air horn as a distraction. Careful! Make sure these sorts of tools are ONLY used in instances of fighting and not to correct unwanted behaviors.

What is your protocol in poor weather?

Your animal's safety and comfort should be the most important consideration.

What is your protocol if an animal under your care should get lost?

Communicate with the owner immediately, contact local animal control, secure the other dogs, and help the owner with any and all efforts toward finding the lost dog.

What would you do if an animal falls ill or gets injured while in your care?

Communicate with you immediately and will either go to your designated vet or to the closest emergency vet. Also, make the sure your contract is clear about who is responsible for vet bills. TIP: make sure your dog walker is authorized on your dog's veterinary account or else the vet may not be able to treat your dog without your verbal consent, which can be the difference between life and death in an emergency.

What will you do if my dog performs an undesirable behavior?

You want a dog walker that has enough training to observe and interpret why this behavior is occurring, and then take confident steps to redirect the dog to a more

Hiring a Dog Walker *(continued)*

desirable behavior. Also, it may be beneficial to clarify specifically with your dog walker regarding what they might find “undesirable” versus what you consider undesirable.

If my dog chooses to ignore you, how will you get his attention?

A great walker will use fun and novel ways to get your dog’s attention like squeaky toys and funny noises, and will never punish or scold the dog.

Do you allow dogs on prong, choke, or shock collars in your walking group?

Desired answer: NO!

These inhumane collars can cause injuries and lead to long-term behavioral problems. Learn more at sfspca.org/prong.

Can we go on a test or shadow walk, where I observe you walking my dog?

Logistically this can be challenging but your future dog walker should be open to a test walk. They shouldn’t have anything to hide.

How would you introduce my dog to his new walk group?

A good off leash dog walker will start your dog out on a long line until he/she has established a relationship with your dog and understands them.

What is required of me if I want to be your client?

You’re looking for a walker who will at minimum require your dog’s vaccine records, full information on veterinary caregivers and emergency contacts, and that will visit you at your home to meet your dog, learn your in-home protocols related to picks and drop-offs, get your door code, etc.

What signs do you look out for that would indicate that the dog prefers not to go on a walk today?

Fear or abnormal behavior, including signs of medical issues.

Who will actually be walking my dog? How many people are part of the organization? Will it be the same person every time?

If you have a dog that is shy of strangers it is best to find someone who will guarantee that only one consistent person will be walking your dog every time. Some dog walking companies will have you meet the trained owner first but then have their less experienced/not certified team members actually walking your dog. Make sure that you meet and vet all individuals that will be in contact with your dog!

Walk me through a typical day of my dog’s experience with you

Dogs should never be in a vehicle on a trip longer than an hour. Find out what time of day they will be taking your pup and what time they will return.

Tips:

- Have your dog walker demonstrate that how to put on/use your dog’s walking equipment.
- When seeking a dog walker, go hiking in an area where you know a lot of dog walkers take their clients’ dogs, observe their behavior toward the dogs in their care, and then ask for business cards.
- Check references.
- Establish a payment schedule (what day and what form) in a contract from the start.
- If you just adopted your dog, wait a few weeks before having a walker take your dog out. Your walker is relying on you for reliable information on your dog, and it is not fair to him or your dog to put them in potentially dangerous situations.

Hiring a Dog Walker *(continued)*

- Pro tip: Choose a day that your dog walker doesn't know you will be home and stay home to see when they come/ how they do, how they interact with your pup. Unfortunately there are dog walkers that do not deliver on what they promise.