

Selecting a Boarding Facility



Here are some questions to ask when selecting a boarding facility, followed by the response you should expect.

Health and Medical

What is your protocol in case my pet has a medical emergency?

Ideally you'd want the facility to have a partnership with a nearby 24-hour veterinary facility, and as a plus, the willingness to take your pet to your own vet if something comes up.

If my pet doesn't eat for a few days or seems just "off," what is your protocol for non-emergency medical care for my pet?

The kennel should contact you, but let you decide how to proceed. If you are not reachable, the pet should be taken to the vet within 24 hours.

How often are the kennels and dishes cleaned and with what? How are the kennels cleaned between boarders?

Will they bathe your dog if he becomes soiled with urine or excrement?

What is the regular feeding schedule, and can it be adapted if your dog has special needs? Can you bring your dog's regular food?

Are all boarded pets required to be current on their vaccinations, including the vaccine for canine kennel cough (Bordetella)?

Care and Management

Do you have attendants monitoring the animals 24 hours per day?

Desired answer: yes!

What does a day in the life of my dog look like here?

Hopefully this will include at least 3 potty breaks per day, some one-on-one time with people, dog play if appropriate, and other forms of exercise and socialization.

Do you let dogs of all sizes and ages play together?

Ideally, the answer would be: No, dogs are separated for play into groups of similar age, size, and energy level.

What is the ratio of dogs to attendants during free play?

In a perfect world you'd want one person for every seven small dogs and one person for every five large dogs, or as close to this as you can find.

What training do your attendants and caregivers have?

Look for staff with at least a few weeks of intensive training in animal care, welfare, body language, behavior, basic medical triage, CPR, wound management, etc.

If a scuffle breaks out between two dogs in your care, how exactly do you address it?

Staff should carefully separate using safe, humane methods (noise, a splitter, etc.), and then give the two dogs some quiet time apart to cool off.

If undesirable behavior is observed in a dog, how exactly do attendants address that?

Hopefully the staff would observe what led to the undesirable behavior and redirect the dog to something more appropriate, or change its environment to

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help it feel more comfortable. (Things a kennel should NOT use: squirt bottles, physical punishment, or loud, verbal reprimands).

Can I observe a play session and see how your attendants interact with and handle the dogs in their care?

Ideal answer: Yes!

Facility

Prior to booking with you, will you let me tour all of the areas where my dog would be spending time?

Desired answer: Yes!

During what hours am I allowed to come visit my dog?

Desired answer: Any time the facility is open.

What are your drop off and pick up hours? What if my return is delayed?

Desired answer: The facility would hopefully be willing to make arrangements to discharge your dog to you after hours with reasonable notice.

When is it permissible for me to call to check on how my dog is doing?

Desired answer: Anytime the facility is open.

What are their security provisions? Do the kennels and cages have good latches? Are the fences to the outdoor runs at least 6 feet high?

Observe

- If your state requires boarding kennel inspections, make sure the kennel displays a license or certificate indicating that it meets mandated standards. This is required for kennels in the San Francisco Bay Area, but may vary in other areas.
- Does the facility look and smell clean?
- Is there sufficient ventilation and light?
- Is a comfortable temperature maintained?
- Does the staff seem knowledgeable and caring?
- Does each dog have his own adequately sized indoor-outdoor run or an indoor run and a schedule for exercise?
- Are outdoor runs and exercise areas protected from wind, rain, and snow?
- Are resting boards and bedding provided to allow dogs to rest off the concrete floor?
- Do dogs get leash walks in addition to off-leash exercise time at the facility, if requested? Does this cost extra?
- Visit twice if you can, and observe how much barking you hear each time from the kennel area. Sound can give important information as to the comfort and stress levels of the canine clientele.
- Are the kennels, runs, and exercise areas clean and free from excrement?
- Is the facility accredited by the American Boarding Kennels Association?
- Check with the Better Business Bureau—have any concerning complaints been lodged against the facility?