



What to Look for in a Professional Dog Walker/Day Care Service

We all have demanding hectic lives with work and personal circumstances meaning that sometimes our dog is pushed to the bottom of the list. More and more people are using doggy daycare or dog walkers to ensure that their pet isn't left at home all day and that it is socialised and exercised during these busy times. However with the rise in people requiring these services many have seen this as a money-making opportunity and are offering a truly appalling service.

Below is a list of questions that you should be asking – This list is not exhaustive, there may be others you want to ask, but you should have at least covered the ones listed below before entrusting them with your pet and your house key!!!

- Are they insured? Don't take their word for it - ask to see their insurance certificate and find out how many dogs the insurance covers – most companies only cover six dogs on a walk and this includes any of their own dogs that are on the walk as well.
- If it's a daycare facility, are they licensed by their local council?
- Can they provide references? Ask for current up to date references provided within the last 6 months.
- Have they been police checked? This is a check on police national databases for criminal convictions and the person is provided with a slip of paper to state that they have none.
- How many dogs do they have at any one time in their home or out on a walk? This also coincides with question 1) as the number of dogs they take on a walk should not exceed the number covered by the Insurance and the walker should be able to control all dogs under his or her care, both on a walk and at home.
- Will they be putting their ID disc with their contact details on your dog's collar/harness?



- What type of transport do they have? If they have a car or van then ask if the vehicle is fitted with a tailgate guard (keeps the dog securely in the boot area when the boot lid is opened) or fitted with crates. Dogs should not be sat unsecured on the front seat and should not be squashed into the boot. Six dogs in a Vauxhall Astra Estate, for example is totally unacceptable.
- How will they introduce your dog into the group? They should come around to your house to meet your dog and then invite you and your dog out on a walk with the other dogs that your dog will be walked with – your dog should never be just put into the back of a confined space with a number of dogs he has never met before.
- Have they had any formal training? There are plenty of courses available for Professional Dog walkers teaching them about first aid, the law around dogs in public places and Canine Social Behaviour and should be able to provide certificates showing they have completed this type of training. Do not accept a person saying 'I have had dogs for many years' (there are many people out there who have had dogs for many years but who you wouldn't trust walking your dog) or 'I can deal with dogs with behaviour problems as I have had problem dogs in the past' or 'I can also offer you some training for your dog' (a person who is inexperienced in these areas can cause more problems than they solve – look for experience in a training school as an assistant or instructor or that they have taken a course in Canine Behaviour) .
- How long will my dog be walked for? This should be the length of time that your dog will be out walking and should not include the travelling time to and from the park/woods or the time spent going from one house to another picking up dogs. Also, some dog walkers will leave one group of dogs in their van whilst going off to walk others. This is dangerous from a safety point of view, and also depending on the weather conditions, not a great idea!



- Where will my dog be walked and will it be off the lead? You should be asked if you agree to your dog being let off the lead and asked to sign the form containing your dog's details consenting to letting it off the lead. Any responsible walker will also put their ID disc on your dog in the unlikely case he goes missing whilst in their care.
- How much will it cost? Don't always go for the cheapest as it normally means you will be sacrificing quality.
- Are the dogs allowed to charge around and play without the walker/day carer understanding what is acceptable play behaviour and what isn't? Dogs who are nervous will not enjoy being slammed into by over friendly but over exuberant young dogs. Does your dog walker/day carer understand dog facial signals and body language?
- If your dog is in daycare, how long are the dogs left for if the person in charge needs to go out? Are they separated or just left all together?
- Be aware that letting someone look after your dog/puppy and not monitoring playtimes may result in your dog getting excited on walks every time they see another dog in the distance, and they may end up not being able to greet in a calm fashion.
- Does your chosen daycare facility know that young dogs need proper sleep times and will need somewhere quiet to go in order to have the rest they need whilst they are still growing? No-one should be collecting their dogs and saying their dogs are exhausted from being at day care all day! Even adult dogs need some 'time out' sessions where they are allowed to chill and relax. Some dogs do not have a 'switch off button' and would encourage other dogs to play all day. This is not good for your dog, either mentally or physically.



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Contact Gail Ward
Mob: 07711 532210
Email: enquiry@cdts.co.uk



As already stated this list is not exhaustive and you may have further questions for whoever is looking after your dog depending on you or your dog's circumstances. If you are looking for a someone to care for your dog don't just go by other's recommendations – what is ok for their dog may not be ideal for yours! A good dog walker will allow you to come out on a walk with them so you can observe how they control the dogs in their care. A good day care facility would allow you to come and observe plus potentially offer to take your dog for a short session the first 2-3 times to make sure they are not overwhelmed by the situation.