

Choosing a Boarding Facility for your pet

Leaving a family pet at a boarding facility is a big decision, and there are many factors to consider before choosing whom you trust to care for your loved one in your absence. Many people make the mistake of projecting their own guilt about having to leave their pet and do not consider the factors that will have the most impact as far as stress and health issues for the animal taken away from its owners and familiar surroundings. There are many choices in boarding facilities available, including places with areas for dogs to play together and those where pets receive lots of "people attention." but do not come into contact with other pets.

To narrow down the choices, think first if what your pet's normal daily life is like. If you often take your dog to a park or elsewhere to play with other dogs, then he or she might enjoy that type of setting. On the other hand, if your pet only interacts with people and is not used to other dogs, then it would be a nightmare to be left in a strange place without you, his owner, and with a bunch of strange animals sniffing and potentially bullying him. Some people make the mistake of leaving a pet not used to other animals in just such a place, because they do not want their pet in a cage. What they fail to realize is that the pet's own private space (i.e., the cage) can give him or her sense of security. Also, even in the places that have play yards, the pets are usually housed in cages when they are not outdoors.

Once the decision has been made which type of place to choose, the next step is to arrange a visit to tour the facility and ask questions about supervision, feeding, bathing and how potential illnesses or emergencies are handled. Supervision is especially important in places that allow animals to play together. Playtime should only be under the watchful eyes of qualified attendants, much like the playgrounds at your child's school where there are always one or more teachers on site to make sure everyone gets along and to immediately handle any problems that arise.

In selecting a facility, find out if you can bring your own pet's food and if the staff will feed your pet on the schedule you follow at home. The same holds true for medicines, supplements and treats that are a part of your pet's daily routine. If food is provided by the facility, make sure it is a bland diet that will not cause any digestive upset. Neither dogs nor cats handle sudden changes of diet well, especially if they are already a little stressed by being in an unfamiliar place. If you are boarding a cat, you will want to choose a facility that has a quiet area exclusively for felines. It should be a comfortable place in which the staff will spend time giving the cat TLC several times a day and is also diligent about cleaning the litter box promptly, as well.

Ask how often your pet will be walked or otherwise get exercise and whether he or she will be exposed to any other animals. This is very important for dogs that are not used to being around other animals. You will want your pets to get lots of attention from the staff, but to minimize stress and potential bites and scratches, your pet should not be walked with -or left with- other pets at any time. Cleanliness should be obvious on a tour of the facility, but

you also can ask how often the pet areas are cleaned (hopefully every time your pet goes potty, so that nothing is left on the floor to leave soiled areas or odors). Also, ask if pets are cleaned or bathed if they do have accidents and soil themselves.

When in new or unfamiliar surroundings, some pets may develop upset stomachs due to stress and, as a result, have diarrhea that will require cleaning or a bath. This condition also requires special dietary attention. If digestive issues persist, medical attention may be needed. This should not be an issue if you are boarding your pet at a veterinary facility, but it is still a good idea to ask what the policy is for boarded animals. If you are considering a non-veterinary boarding facility, ask if the staff has a relationship with a veterinary office for treatment, if needed, or if they are willing to contact and even transport your pet to your veterinarian.

Once you made the initial decision to choose either an open, playtime environment or a more controlled environment where your pet will only have contact and TLC with people, the rest is basically common sense, but hopefully this article helps you to ask the right questions. If you use a boarding facility regularly, your pet may become more comfortable with the staff and surroundings, and it will not be stressful at all. A good sign that you have picked the right place to board your pet is how he or she acts when you both walk in the front door. If your pet's tail is wagging, and he or she walks away readily with a staff member that is friendly and knows your pet's name, chances are you have picked the right place.