

Choosing Doggie Daycare: Characteristics of Good and Bad Facilities

Things to Look For:

- **Adequate staffing for supervision of canine clients:** Minimum of one staff person per 10 dogs, ideally with a second person on the premises in case of emergency. Staff monitors dog activity closely.
- **Knowledgeable, caring staff:** Staff is well-educated and skilled in dog handling and behavior management, and employees obviously like dogs.
- **Clean facility:** No lingering odors. Dog waste is promptly removed and appropriately disposed of. Floors are routinely cleaned and disinfected. Facility is neat and free of debris and clutter. Canine clients are required to be reasonably flea-free.
- **Safe environment:** Matted floors (indoors), with no direct access of dogs to outer doors. Fences (outdoors) are high enough to keep dogs contained and in good repair. Dogs are divided into size and play-style-appropriate play groups. Choke chains, if any, are removed prior to group play. Introductions of new dogs are done slowly and carefully.
- **Enriched environment:** Dogs have plenty of toys and equipment to play with, on, under, and through, as well as access to safe, comfortable napping spots. Staff spends time interacting with dogs. Dogs are walked outdoors routinely (for indoor facilities) to maintain and encourage good housetraining habits.
- **Comprehensive screening process:** Owners are questioned as to dog's history with other dogs and people, and other potential

health and behavior issues. New dogs are evaluated in an intake interview *prior* to the intended stay, and introduced to other dogs one at a time, starting with the most congenial.

- **Vaccination requirements:** Center maximizes protection for all canine clients by requiring proof of current vaccinations or, alternatively, satisfactory titer levels.
- **Compatible philosophies:** Confirm that the center's dog handling and training philosophies are aligned with yours, and that the staff supports them.

Things to Avoid:

- **Overcrowding:** A general rule of thumb is 100 square feet per large dog; 50 to 60 square feet per small to medium-sized dog. Overcrowding leads to aggression.
- **Limited access:** Center has policies prohibiting owners from visiting their dogs at any time, with or without warning.
- **Unwillingness or inability to meet dog's needs:** Center should be willing and able to feed and medicate dogs as requested by owner.
- **Poor customer service:** Loving dogs is not enough; staff should also be courteous and friendly to human clients.
- **Dogs left unattended:** This should never happen. If a second person is not on the premises as back up at all times, arrangements must be in place for someone to arrive quickly if an emergency requires the regular day care attendant to leave.