

How to Choose a Dog Walker

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Choosing a dog walker is a very important decision – it deserves taking the time to choose well. Your dog walker will have access to your home and will be responsible for a dearly loved family member, your dog. A poor quality dog walker can have a negative effect on the well being of your dog, as well as your wallet. On the other hand, a good dog handler can complement your training efforts and enhance your dog's lifestyle.

You want to ensure that your dog is well looked after and your money is well spent.

Here are some points to consider when interviewing prospective dog walkers:

1. Are they licensed?

- When a company is licensed, you know that they are taking their work seriously.

2. Are they insured?

- When a company is insured, you know that they value the safety and well being of their staff and clients. It is important that the company has third party damage coverage (care, custody, and control); this is the coverage that insures your pet and your property.
- Require proof of coverage. Ask to see an Insurance Certificate. Any insured dog walking company should be more than happy to show you one.
- If you have any doubts, contact the insurance company directly to verify the company's coverage.

3. Are they bonded?

- When a company is bonded, you can be confident about the security of your personal belongings. A typical insurance policy does not cover theft by employees, thus bonding is essential.
- Require proof of coverage from your dog walker.

4. Do they have staff?

- The main advantage of having multiple dog handlers is scheduling flexibility. As a client, you always have a backup handler if your primary dog handler is

unavailable for any reason. Know who your backup handler is. Ask for their credentials. It is your right to have this information.

- If the company does not have any staff members, who will provide back-up services in the event of emergency?

5. How is their staff trained?

- If a dog-walking company has staff, it is critical that there is consistency of service among those staff members.
- As an owner, you might ask these questions:
 - Is there a training manual? Can you see it?
 - What are the training practices for new staff? How many days does a new staff member spend in one-on-one training? Will you see a senior staff member training a new staff member during that period?
 - How does the company ensure that each handler has up to date, accurate information about your dog when he or she needs it?

6. How are the dogs transported and are the staff required to provide driver's abstracts?

7. Are their staff members required, at minimum, to have basic pet 1st aid training?

8. Where will your dog be taken? What kind of setting will the walks take place in?

9. Emergencies:

- What is their protocol/plan?
- What vet will the dog-walking company use in the event of an emergency?
- Have you signed a waiver for your vet in the event of an emergency? You might like to ensure that your vet has this signed waiver on file.

10. What is the company's cost per walk? How did they set that price? If they are above the average, what are you getting for that service that is special? If they are below the average, find out how they are managing this low price. Be sure that they are not cutting corners on anything essential such as: training, hike duration, time spent cleaning your dog, etc.

11. Finally, listen to your instincts and be thorough so that, once you have chosen your dog walker, you are confident that you have made a good decision.

If you have any further questions, or you feel that we have omitted something from this checklist that would be helpful or important, please feel free to contact us.