

Choosing your kennel: questions to ask your doggie caregivers

By Louise Yates

Dogs are social animals who like hanging out with other dogs, so kennels can be lots of fun. If you chose to kennel, here are some things to think about so you chose the right kennel for you and your family. A good kennel will answer your questions over the phone and in-person at an on-site visit. While many articles encourage you to drop in so you can see how a kennel is “really run”, a better approach is to make an appointment. Why? If a kennel is dirty or bad, getting a couple of hours notice isn't going to give the kennel operator enough time to make it right before you arrive. If you scheduled a time to meet, your kennel operator can adjust their work schedule so you can spend as much time with them as you want, while not interrupting the dogs' feeding, playing and housekeeping schedule.

Kennels use different facilities and philosophies. When you're looking for the right kennel for you and your dog's needs, here are some key questions to ask:

CARING PEOPLE

There's a difference between a kennel owner and those who care for and spend time with your dog. The caregivers should be trained to recognize dog body language, emotions and the signs of illness.

- Who are the caregivers? Can you talk with and meet them?
- What animal health and wellbeing qualifications and experience do they have?
- Do they get to know my pet?
- What kind of information do they collect about my pet before arrival?

SAFE FACILITIES

The building, grounds and procedures must be safe, comfortable and clean.

- Can you visit to see the entire facility, including where your dog will stay?
- Is the facility constructed with health and safety in mind – eg. every door is a “double door” so your dog can't bolt out and run away – that includes the front reception area? Are latches secured?
- Is the facility clean and neat?
- What is the environment like? Ambient sound? Traffic? Noises?
- How safe and secure are the dogs after closing time?

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES AND PROTOCOLS

How the kennel is run can make a difference to your dog's health and happiness.

- If play pools are available, is there 100 per cent constant supervision? (All dogs, especially small ones, can drown in a small kiddie pool. Being nearby is not good enough – watching the pool is essential.)
- Which vaccinations are mandatory and how long before boarding do they need to be done?
- What brand of food is served?
- What do they do to ensure that poisons, chemicals and cleaners not accessible to animals?
- What do they do with aggressive dogs?

SPECIAL SERVICES

Community play time where dogs from many families interact is a way to socialize a pet if done correctly, and if not done well, can be extremely dangerous.

- Is there a minimum of one supervisor per 10 dogs for community play time? (To ensure pet safety, this standard recommended by the Pet Care Services Association.)
- Are dogs temperament tested before being allowed to interact with others?
- Do they have constant supervision?
- Are only dogs of a similar size grouped together?

BUSINESS PRACTICES

- What are the cancellation policies?
- What environmentally friendly practices do they have?
- What do they do for animal welfare and dog community in general?
- Do they give back to the community in any way?

RATES

Once you're comfortable with the people, facilities, operating philosophies, you'll want to know costs.

- What does it cost to board my pet for one day or night? Eg. is arrival Tuesday, departure Wednesday one night or two days? Is there a check-out time? If so, what am I charged for staying late?
- What is included in the daily rate? Food? Bedding?
- Are there extra costs for medications, play time, etc.?

Selecting a kennel that fits your style can be a very positive experience for both you and your dog. It gives your dog a safe place away from home and a social outlet, and it gives you peace of mind and the freedom to travel knowing that your pet is properly cared for, happy and healthy.

Louise Yates and her husband Dan operate [K-Lane Kennels](#) near Regina. She is a Certified Pet Care Technician and Pet First Aid Instructor.