

Boarding Your Cat

For a variety of reasons, more people are discovering the delight of living with cats. In urban areas, apartment dwellers find that cats offer companionship, without the need for frequent outdoor exercise periods. In rural areas, cats still fulfill their function as rodent catchers for many households. If you are a cat owner, you are undoubtedly very attached to your furry roommate. However, there will be times when you will have to make arrangements for your cat's care when you are traveling on business, vacations, or when you host out-of-town guests who are allergic to cats. Therefore, you should examine some of the facts about cat care that will help you to understand the advantages of boarding your cat with an PCSA member pet care facility.

What options are available?

It is important to remember that cats do not usually travel well. They do not usually enjoy it, nor do they adapt well to travel. Many people who try to take their cats along with them on their vacation end up spending most of their vacation time searching for their escaped pets. Leaving your cat with friends is just as unsatisfactory. A cat must go through an adjustment period in a new environment, and this means that your cat will not look upon your friend's house as "home" for quite awhile. Therefore, your cat may try to escape from the strange house at every opportunity or hide as a fear reaction. Most cat owners recognize that it is not fair to impose this kind of responsibility on their friends, nor is it a safe arrangement for their pets. Having a boarding facility care for your pets in your absence is, therefore, the best alternative. The best way to arrange for such care is to entrust your cat to an PCSA member pet care facility, where the security arrangements are adequate to insure that your cat will not escape, and where the staff are trained in observing and handling the problems that might arise in your absence. You can be certain that PCSA members are trying to keep current on the latest developments within the industry and that they truly care about your cat.

How do you arrange for placing your cat in a boarding facility?

Stop by your local PCSA boarding facility and visit with the owner. Get acquainted with the people who will be caring for your cat. Ask questions—take nothing for granted. Find out if toys or bedding are welcome. Find out about the diet the facility provides. (If there is a special diet that you would like your cat to adhere to, most boarding facilities will allow you to provide such food and will see to it that your cat is fed only what you request.) Discuss safety features. Boarding cats requires good security to prevent escapes. Discuss frankly any qualms you may have about boarding your cat. The boarding facility staff will appreciate your frankness and your interest.

The experienced staff members at an PCSA boarding facility are trained to recognize the warning signs of potential health problems, and will contact a veterinarian if they feel it is called for. Many times it is easier for the boarding facility staff to detect problems than it is for the owner of the cat. For example, urinary problems, a warning sign that deserves attention, can more easily be detected in the boarding facility than at home, since the cat is closely supervised.

It is not, however, part of the staff's job to diagnose or to prescribe. If your cat requires veterinary aid while he or she is boarding, you should be aware that you are financially responsible for such aid. Discuss, before boarding, any medication or special care your cat might need. Most boarding facilities offer a certain amount of individual care (playing with, talking to, or petting) but you must be reasonable. Asking the facility owner to allow your cat privileges that might result in an escape is not fair to either the boarding facility or your cat.

Make certain that you understand the rate structure for all services and hours of operation. The fee for boarding includes, not only the care of your cat, but also the peace of mind that comes from knowing that your cat is safe and with someone you can trust.

One way of measuring the boarding facility owner's interest in the profession is through the facility's membership with PCSA. You can be certain that PCSA members are trying to keep current on the latest developments within the industry and that they truly care about your pet. Look for the membership certificate and PCSA Code of Ethics proudly displayed.

Facts to consider

Keep in mind that cats react much differently in a strange environment than dogs do. Cats are instinctively solitary animals. They do not run in packs like dogs. Therefore, when confronted with strange surroundings, a cat's normal response is to withdraw physically and mentally into a protected, solitary state. For this reason, cats enjoy the "protected" feeling they get from being caged while in the boarding facility.

While it is true that most dogs want to run around and get acquainted, your cat will probably want to sit in the corner of the cage and stare, until it feels comfortable in the new environment. Human contact does not normally accelerate this period of acclimatizing. It has to take place at the cat's own speed. A common reaction of cat owners to the idea of caging is, "My cat loves to run around." Perhaps this is true at home, but while in unfamiliar surroundings, the cage gives the best feeling of safety.

"But what about exercise?" Here again, the difference between a cat and a dog must be understood. Dogs need space in which to get their necessary exercise, whereas cats exercise isometrically. This means that if a cat has enough room to stretch, he or she can exercise every muscle in the body. When your cat is in strange surroundings, around strange cats and strange smells, your cat will undoubtedly much prefer "safety" to "space."

Immunization

Fortunately, within the last several years, there have been significant advances in immunization programs for cats. In past years, there were a number of contagious airborne viruses that caused serious respiratory problems in cats. These viruses could not be controlled by any means except complete isolation of all cats from each other. Now, however, thanks to advances made by the veterinary pharmaceutical companies, there are effective vaccines available to prevent such diseases. Most boarding facilities have strict policies regarding the immunization programs for these diseases. You should be aware of the boarding facility's policy and discuss it with your veterinarian prior to boarding your cat. In fairness to the facility, you should also make sure that your cat is not exposed to any contagious cat diseases prior to boarding.

Stress is a factor

Any animal in strange surroundings suffers from stress. This means that the normal immune process is affected, as well as eating and digestive habits. Your PCSA member facility will do everything possible to minimize the effects of stress on your cat. For this reason, it is a good procedure for them to allow your cat to adjust to the boarding environment at his or her own rate. However, you can help to minimize the effects of stress by trying to make the boarding experience as pleasant as possible for your cat. Remember that the more often your cat boards, the more adjusted your cat will be to the boarding environment, and the easier the boarding process becomes for your cat.

Welcoming your cat home

After you pick up your cat from the boarding facility, let it "tell" you about its stay. Lavish attention on your cat so he or she knows it was missed. If your cat is an indoor/outdoor cat, be sure to keep him or her inside for a day or two before allowing it outside again. Just as your cat had to adjust to the boarding facility, so will your cat need to adjust to being home again. Allow your cat the time to find that 'at home' feeling again.