

Boarding Your Dog

Today, more and more concerned pet owners are choosing to board their dogs at boarding kennels. Kennel managers who belong to PCSA are professional pet-care providers who make a public commitment to quality pet care and who subscribe to the PCSA Code of Ethics and the Bill of Rights for Pets in Boarding or Daycare Facilities. Their kennels often offer a variety of pet care services such as daycare, pet sitting, special exercise programs, cat boarding, grooming, retail sales, training, and pet shipping. What are the advantages of boarding your dog? The vast majority of dogs adapts well and enjoys their stay at the kennel. For some dogs—puppies which have not had their immunizations, extremely old dogs with chronic illnesses, very aggressive dogs, dogs that require medication more than twice a day—you might consider boarding with your veterinarian, asking your pet care provider if they offer in-home care, or using an PCSA pet sitter. Keep in mind, however, that pet sitting in your home, even when it is performed by a trained PCSA professional, does not offer the same level of supervision that boarding does. Furthermore, when you are not at home with your dog, his or her behavior might differ significantly from the normal behavior. For instance your dog might try to “escape” to find you, become destructive to your home, or become aggressive toward the pet sitter.

You should definitely consider boarding your dog rather than taking him or her on vacation with you. Many motels will not accept dogs, and those that do charge extra and become very upset if your dog annoys their other guests. Pets can become ill as a result of traveling because of the frequent changes in water. Many dogs suffer heat prostration while locked in the car when owners go sightseeing, eating or shopping. The national parks have an abundance of lost dogs that somehow got away from their owners and couldn't be found before the family had to leave for home. Another serious risk is exposure to various parasites and diseases such as heartworm, ticks, hookworms, fleas, and mange.

Selecting a boarding facility: Stop by a boarding facility and visit with the owner. Get acquainted with the people who will be caring for your dog. Ask questions; take nothing for granted. Are toys or bedding welcome? How will your dog be exercised? What will the facility feed my dog? Talk about safety features. Discuss frankly any qualms you may have about boarding. They will appreciate your frankness and interest.

The experienced staff members at an PCSA 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 pet care provider to detect problems than it is for the owner of the dog. A good example is blood in the urine: A warning sign that deserves attention can more easily be detected in the boarding facility than at home because the dog is exercised in a specific area that is cleaned regularly. It is not, however, part of the pet care provider's job to diagnose or to prescribe. If your dog does require veterinary care while being boarded, you should be aware that you—the pet's owner—are financially responsible for such care. Discuss, before boarding, any medication or special care your dog might need. Many boarding facilities offer specialized play programs such as playschool and nature walks.

During boarding it is possible that dogs might step in their stools or urine and become dirty. This can happen in the cleanest of facilities. Also, some of the finest disinfectants available for sanitizing are not always the most pleasant smelling, and the odor may cling to your dog's coat. Bathing or grooming may be a welcome solution. Make certain to advise the pet care provider if you want your dog to have a bath on the day he or she goes home. Make certain you understand the rate structure for all services and hours of operation. The fee for boarding includes the care of your pet, as well as the peace of mind that goes with knowing that he or she is safe and with someone you can trust. One standard of measuring the pet care provider's interest in his profession is his membership in PCSA. You can be certain PCSA members are trying to keep current on the latest developments within the industry and that they truly care. Their membership certificates will be proudly displayed.

A working partnership When you have selected your boarding facility, keep in mind that successful boarding is the result of the partnership between you and the manager, working together for the best interest of your dog. As a responsible pet owner there are a few things you must attend to before bringing your dog in to board. Make certain all immunizations are current. The manager will be happy to discuss the immunization requirements with you. Your pet should be free of internal and external parasites and not have been exposed to any contagious diseases. Do not feed your dog for at least four hours prior to boarding to minimize the possibility of stomach upset. Boarding is a great alternative, but separation from the family or being in strange surroundings can produce stress in your dog. And stress can result in lowered resistance to disease and sometimes even temporary changes in behavior. Be sure to inform the boarding facility of any special idiosyncrasies or medical problems your dog may have (history of epilepsy or fear of thunder, etc.) that may assist in keeping your dog healthy and happy.

Dogs should be prepared psychologically for boarding. It's best, of course, to begin with a puppy as soon as the immunization program is complete. (Puppies usually learn very quickly to enjoy boarding.) Some boarding facilities offer daycare services enabling you to leave your dog for a few hours at a time. This is an excellent way to introduce your dog to boarding. After just a few visits your dog accepts a pet care facility as a normal way of life.

The psychological preparation of a dog for boarding—and also for helping to develop a healthy personality—includes getting your dog used to new people and experiences (socialization). This is probably most easily accomplished by taking him or her through obedience classes, spending a few days at a dog daycare, and occasionally boarding him or her. Naturally, a dog who is relaxed about boarding is more likely to board well. (A pet owner sometimes needs reminding that it is not beneficial to lament over the dog in the front office before leaving, nor should the suitcases come out the day before the trip—both of these things cause the dog to be unnecessarily upset.)

Understanding the kennel environment: It is important to understand the possible effects of stress on a dog and to do everything possible to minimize stress both prior to and immediately after boarding. Sometimes temporary behavior changes can occur as a result of unfamiliar surroundings. While boarding, your best friend tears up the bed that has been slept in for years. Or "Killer," that rowdy scourge of the neighborhood, turns into a little lamb. Eating habits change under stress, and a dog assimilates food differently. Some will eat like canaries at home and like vultures at a boarding facility. They may put on a few pounds. Others can lose weight though eating well or lose weight by not eating enough. Life in a boarding facility can be very exciting, and some dogs lose weight because they run the weight off as they charge around barking at other dogs and having a wonderful time. These dogs often leave the facility exhausted but happy, and sleep a lot the first couple of days they are home. All of the preparation by the pet owner merely points out that successful boarding depends not only upon the pet care facility, but also upon how well the owner prepares the dog for the experience.

Now that your best friend is home again: When your dog is picked up, he or she will be very excited to see you. Do not feed your dog (though he or she will act hungry after getting back to familiar turf) for at least three hours, and then be very careful not to overfeed. Also, excitement might cause your dog to pant a lot and become thirsty. Give a few ice cubes to hold him or her over until feeding time. Again, in a happy, excited state, excessive food and water consumption can create problems.

The vast majority of dogs view their stay at the boarding facility as a vacation. Relax and enjoy your trip.