

# What You Need To Know Before Starting a Dog Day Care



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**Disclaimer:** We make no promises of success in this guide. You may lose money if you start a dog day care. There are many factors involved that could alter your results. We do not claim that you will make any certain income from a dog day care business.

*\* You are free to distribute this guide.*

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### **Introduction**

Welcome to the wonderful world of Dog Day Care. With a little background information, preparation, and a lot of effort, you will be ready to start your own. Although Dog Day Care is a wonderful alternative to the stay-at-home versus corporate world, there are potentially serious risks and liabilities. It is important to do all the necessary homework and preparations now. Lets start with some Dog Mentality.

## **Dog Mentality**

It is of utmost importance to understand how a dog thinks and therefore what triggers certain responses and behaviors. The pack mentality is a prime example. Dogs are pack animals, which means they operate in numbers.

Packs are made up of several dogs or people-whichever are available. Dogs can quickly conform to one pack versus another. For example, if a dog is in a home environment with three other dogs where he is the dominant leader, then goes to day care where he is challenged by a “veteran,” he quickly learns his status in this new pack. He does not go home to assume this new found submissive role, but has two different personalities, one at home with the “home pack” and one at day care with his new buddies.

This is important to know because when an owner tells you about his or her dog, a wise trainer does not take too much stock in any information given. For example, a man drops his dog off saying, “He is just a sweetheart and gets along with everyone.” Then, the dog meets his new pack and realizes that there is a vacancy for top dog. One of the others challenge him and a fight ensues. The owner is mad because it is your fault-his dog never does that at home.

Your problem is that you have not properly introduced the dogs and have assumed his home behavior would continue in this new environment. Although it is a good idea to ask temperament questions of the owner, you should be trained to evaluate behavior yourself. We will get to this later.

Dogs are also “den animals.” This means that they claim certain spaces as theirs and will protect it as such. This is why crate training works so well. The crate is a small den in which they find security. Eventually, a good trainer will increase freedom from this small area to a slightly larger one

until he considers the entire house his den which he will not soil and will protect. This is important to know in a Dog Day Care scenario for several reasons. Territorial issues are the most important. It is a good idea for a territorial dog to get out and play on “neutral” territory, however, once they are comfortable, frequent customers, this behavior could resume. Again, we will discuss later how to introduce new dogs so that this will not be an issue. However, it would be smart of you to keep this information in the forefront of your dog expertise.

Communication is as important between the dogs as it is between you and the dogs. It is essential that you learn how they communicate with one another in order to interpret early signs of problems. Before getting close, dogs first communicate with eye contact. They size each other up and lock in. The first thing you must do is break any “eye lock” going on between dogs. This is the first sign of a struggle. Being relaxed and playful will often encourage dogs to do likewise. When breaking eye contact, remember to play and not be tense. This will encourage dogs to get defensive. You are in control. If you are relaxed, they will not need to be protective or aggressive. Although it is not a great idea to get in between dogs, diverting their attention may be necessary. Again, it is best to do this with play. This is a good reason to practice the chasing game we will discuss later.

In Conclusion, dogs are pack animals. They search out a set role within other dogs and people. This can cause struggles. Understanding that dogs are den animals can aid you with protective issues later and is helpful to remember when introducing new dogs with your more frequent customers. Dogs also communicate differently. The first sign of conflict is usually with eye contact.

## **Introducing New Dogs**

Now that you have your pack established, what do you do when a new customer comes? Whether this one is an “alpha” the more dominant of the pack leaders, or very submissive, the introduction should be the same. You should have a trained, “stable,” dog with which you can evaluate the nature of a new customer. This dog should not be interested in other dogs. A good example would be a middle aged house pet that is used to dogs coming and going and does not feel threatened or excited at the arrival of a new one. This allows you to evaluate the behavior of the new dog without worrying about yours. Look for signs of anxiety:

1. Hair Raised
2. Tail Tucked
3. Mouth Quiver
4. Teeth Showing
5. Neck Craning (Posturing)
6. Submissive Urination
7. Rolling Over
8. Whimpering
9. Growling
10. Freezing in Place

Any of these signs indicate that you must continue a slow, one dog at a time introduction. Give this new dog (A) some time around your indifferent, control dog (B). When dog A becomes comfortable, bring him out with another, submissive dog, one that will want to play, but not challenge. Let these two dogs play until all are comfortable. Then mix another dog, continue until you have a small pack (about four) dogs that can play well. It is not necessary to have one large pack. Keep them small and rotate play and sleep time throughout the day. Remember to keep an eye on all of the packs and continue to watch for signs of anxiety.

If you encounter more aggressive types of anxiety, for example, growling or barking, you will want to follow the same formula, making sure the dogs feels comfortable with one dog before you move on to two, and those two before you move on to three. In these cases, I always introduce such dogs with soft muzzles on. This minimizes the chance of danger but also helps all dogs psychologically. By inhibiting the dogs ability to defend himself, you establish yourself as his security and increase his trust in the other dogs. If you are in any way uncertain of a dog's reaction, use a soft muzzle. It is never a bad idea. After they feel comfortable in their new pack, you may slip the muzzle over his snout and keep watching for anxiety. If you see any signs, place the muzzle back on until he feels comfortable again.

Never introduce dogs on unequal footing. This means if one is on a leash, all must be. If one is off leash, all must be. Dogs tend to be much more defensive if they are on a leash and approached by dogs that are not. If you are closer to one dog than the other, move. Make sure one does not have a toy, treat, etc. Do not have anything in their play space: no toys, blankets, sticks, etc. This can lead to "unequal footing" and spiral into a conflict.

Watch for posturing. As I mentioned in the bullets, posturing is when a dog cranes his neck over another dog. He is trying to make himself bigger. This is a sign that he wants the alpha role, just like rolling over or submissive urination denotes a dogs willingness to abdicate the alpha role. You have not problem if one dog does all of the posturing, he will become the alpha. Every pack has one. However, if he meets resistance and you see two dogs posturing over each other, divert tier attention and get them back into play mode. You may then want to rethink that playgroup. Each play group will usually have an alpha dog, sometimes one alpha male and one alpha female and their submissive pack members. You can not have a pack with more than one alpha of the same sex. Conflict will ensue.

## **Basic Training Techniques**

Although you do not have to be a trainer to run a Dog Day Care and the dogs do not have to be trained to attend a Dog Day Care, some basic training techniques may come in handy. The chasing game is one example. This is a great way to implement play while motivating the “come here” aspect and bond with each dog. Dogs will run to you or away from you. These are the two options. If a dog gets loose and begins to run toward something uninterrupted, he will continue until he catches it. When an owner tries to run after the dog, he will continue running even after he has reached his target. He is playing the chasing game, and the owner is chasing. You need to establish a new role. When you “bark”, they need to run to you.

First, get the dogs attention. You may do this by calling his name, making a loud sound, or making a big gesture. As soon as the dog looks at you, run away. He will be interested and follow. As enthusiastically as possible continue this play and let the dog “catch” you. He will want to be your friend from the on. It will also help in you in any future situations where you may need to get his attention or bring him back to you. Practice this game everyday; don’t wait until you need it.

## **Dealing With Problem Behaviors**

Depending upon your facilities some behaviors can be big problems. Digging is a good example. We will discuss how to “escape proof” your facilities later, however, digging out of or just making a mess out of the place is a very common problem.

Most dogs dig for one of three reasons:

1. Boredom
2. Retrieval

### 3. Heat

It is important to identify why the dogs in your pack are digging. The majority of the time, it is because of boredom. Fortunately, dogs in dog day care should not be doing this. If it is your assumption that they are digging for “fun” or “curiosity” sake, think about regrouping their pack so that they can do a little more playing. Also, you may want to think about the schedule you have them on. Are they getting enough “inside” time to nap? A dog needing rest can substitute bad behaviors for a sleep.

Dogs may often dig to get to a toy or animal. You may have grub worms, mole crickets, or other small type of insects that you would never notice, but that nose out there has. The easiest way to deter these dogs, is to get rid of such pests. There are many pesticides that are safe for animals, but hazardous to rodents. There are also “sound” devices that will drive away such unwanted creatures. Many speculate on putting poop or vinegar in the holes and although I do, it is more for fertilization of future grass than a deterrent. You will have more success if you get to the root of the problem. Another reason dogs dig is because they are hot or otherwise uncomfortable. You will often be able to decipher this behavior because the dog will dig just enough to lie down and then do so. They do not want to use more energy than necessary in this matter. This case is easy enough to rectify: inside nap time, water, and shade.

Barking can also cause the neighbors to complain as well as your customers to worry. Content, well-exercised dogs do not continuously bark. Consider fencing that does not allow the dogs to see other packs or the outside world. The idea is to play together and this is not possible if too many distractions occur. Again, if they see one another, but cannot play or have not been introduced properly this leads to excess barking and tension within the packs. Barking collars and sound devices may help with dogs that bark when excited or through the night, but your best bet is to treat the problem.

Barking through the night is a serious issue if you are doing this out of your home. It is a problem we rarely have. The solution is simple. Get the dogs on a schedule and wear them out. Dogs love schedules. It gives them security. Our dogs get two hour naps in between their play sessions. Depending on the weather, a play session can be anywhere from 20 min. to 4 hours. Dogs tend to expel the same energy no matter how long the play session: the shorter, the more intense. The longer, the more laid back the session becomes. After supper, around 5 o'clock, the dogs are allowed two more play sessions, they are shorter but more intense. Go outside and run with them. They should be tired and happy enough to easily sleep through the night.

### **Facility**

The ideal facility would have indoor crates, runs, a play area, and outdoor play areas. No matter what your set-up, consider a few suggestions.

1. Double Gating
2. Six to eight foot, Shaded Fencing
3. Well or Septic System For Dogs Only
4. Customer Area
5. Viewing Area

Double gating is essential for drop off and pick ups. This means that there is a gate to get inside the area, then a gate to get to the dogs. This gate system allows one dog to be in the "corral" area before being let out for pick up. It prevents any escapes and allows a less chaotic experience for owners. Dog parks have this type of double gate system.

Money spent on gating is well worthwhile. Get the eight foot fences. There are many dogs that can scale a four footer. Also, avoid pickets, wire, or

other fencing that offers the dogs visibility. They should not be able to see other packs or passing traffic. This will keep down on anxiety, nose, and the likely hood that someone from the outside will bother the dogs.

You need somewhere for the poop. You must have your own well or doggie septic system that is not tied into the city system. This is usually a city law.

Have a customer area ready for touring daily. Many people come to check out your facilities. Be ready for them. You should have a “model” play and sleep area that remains clean and full of experienced dog day care clients having fun.

Along the same lines, many Dog Day Cares are offering continual web viewing. Be cautious about this. Understand that this increases your liability. This is not to say that you are not providing a safe, fun facility for the dogs, but this is why most doctors have forbidden cameras in the delivery room- liability. If you would like to offer these services, pick one room that is web casted and rotate play groups and a trainer through so that everyone’s dog gets equal, well supervised camera time without being too much of a strain on your business.

### **Virus and Bacteria**

All day care dogs should have their bordatella vaccine in addition to tier yearly shots. Make sure you have copies of all such vaccinations. However, you must do more to ensure dogs are healthily enough to keep coming. Start with cleaning. Use a non-soap, antibacterial cleaner. Licking soapy residue is not good for K-9 tummies. Make sure water is fresh. Wash linens as often as possible. Encourage dogs to come bathed and make sure they are on flea and tick preventative.

Keep an eye on the poop. When a dog has a runny excrement, notify a parent. This is a sign that he is sick or has worms. If the dog is in your care long term, give him some Pepto Bismol. Look for white rice-like or long fluid worms. If you see these, give the dog some de-wormer. Your local vet should be able to choose some for you to keep on hand.

If one of your dog begins to throw up and or have diarrhea and you suspect it is viral (there is nothing in it that suggest it was something they ate) the best thing to give them is an antibiotic. Your vet will suggest one that can clean up their system and kill the virus immediately. However, make sure they are in quarantine for 24 hours to prevent further sickens. Their linens, bowls, and crate should be cleaned with antibacterial cleaner immediately. If it breaks out in more than one dog, it is always a good idea to tell clients that their has been a virus going around and what symptoms to look for. They will appreciate your thoughtfulness.

Here are some more helpful tips to keep at your finger tips:

#### **Quick Glance Medic Guide\***

<u>Symptom</u>	<u>Home Remedy</u>
Pain Relief	Buffered or Baby Aspirin
Allergies, Itching	Benedryl
Insect Bites/Stings	
Car Sickness	Dramamine (Not for animals with glaucoma or bladder problems)
Vomiting	Pepto-Bismol
Stomach Gas	
Diarrhea	
Induce Vomiting	Hydrogen peroxide 3%
Accidental Poisoning	

Constipation	Mineral Oil
Bad Breath	Raw Carrots; Raw Turkey Neck
Hot Spots	Dissolve 2 adult Aspirin and 1tbls. Rubbing alcohol with 1 cup cool tea
Dehydration	Corn Syrup or Honey

NEVER give animals Acetaminophen, Tylenol, Ibuprofen, Motrin, Nuprin, or Aleve.

\*Startadogdaycare.com recommends that you first seek the assistance of your veterinarian for all medication and dosage. These symptoms may be a clue of a more serious health problem . These remedies in no way replace professional diagnosis or treatment.

For review, here are the basic steps you need to follow to start up your Dog Day Care:

1. Learn some basics in dog behavior.
2. Secure your facility
3. Master some basics in dog training
4. Make sure you know how to introduce dogs to new packs
5. Address problem behaviors
6. Keep them healthy

With this check list you are on your way to running a dog day care. The most important rule in running it successfully is to enjoy the dogs and have fun every day. The customers can tell.

We are not discussing laws, specific liability, zoning, insurance, or accounting. These are often different from county to county, city to city, and state to state. You must look into your areas laws, liability, and zoning regulations.

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