

Choosing a dog daycare is rarely a trivial errand. You are entrusting someone with your dog's safety, social life, and often, their emotional well-being for several hours at a time. The right facility protects your dog from injury and illness, reduces anxiety, and leaves you with the confidence to go to work, travel, or simply run errands without a tight chest. The wrong facility can create behavioral problems, injury risk, or exposure to preventable disease. Below are the precise questions any responsible dog daycare should answer clearly, paired with what those answers reveal and how to verify them during a visit.

Why these questions matter A single sentence of assurance from staff is not enough. Clear policies, concrete numbers, and observable practices tell you more than a promise. For example, a staff-to-dog ratio of two handlers for thirty dogs is not the same as two handlers for eight. A written vaccination policy with specified timelines is different from a vague "up-to-date." The right details reduce surprises and improve outcomes for both dogs and owners.

Daily operations and staff expertise Ask how many dogs are on site at peak times and how many trained staff members supervise them. Expect specific ratios, not platitudes about "careful supervision." Good facilities publish or post their staffing levels; a typical safe range for free-play areas is one staff member per 8 to 12 dogs, depending on dog sizes and activity levels. If the daycare mixes small and large dogs, staffing should be higher, because management of size mismatches demands closer supervision.

Follow up with who does the supervising. Are staff members trained in canine behavior and first aid? Do they have certifications in pet CPR, animal behavior, or professional dog handling? Certifications matter because they indicate exposure to formal training scenarios and emergency protocols. Ask for names of trainers or supervisors, and whether those people handle the dogs directly or only oversee operations. Facilities I trust often have at least one lead handler with multiple years of experience and an ongoing training schedule for the team.

How dogs are grouped and why it matters Request a description of the intake process and how dogs are placed into groups. A responsible daycare does an orientation session or trial day to observe a dog's temperament, play style, and tolerance for group settings. They should explain the criteria they use to place dogs: activity level, play style, size, and social confidence. Beware of answers that reduce grouping to simple size categories alone. Two 20-pound dogs can play completely differently, just as two 60-pound dogs might be polar opposites in energy and bite inhibition.

Observe the groups during a tour. Do dogs self-select into play or do handlers separate them proactively? Is there clear space for dogs to escape and decompress? A quality facility designs run areas with sightlines and several exit points so dogs can avoid unwanted interactions.

Health requirements that should be nonnegotiable Vaccination and parasite protocols protect your dog and others. The daycare should provide a written list of required vaccinations, typically including current rabies, distemper/parvo combination, and Bordetella within a specified timeframe. Ask whether titers are accepted in place of vaccinations; some facilities accept titers for certain vaccines, others do not. If they accept titers, ask how they verify authenticity and timing.

Inquire about flea and tick prevention, and whether there is a policy regarding recent exposure to contagious illnesses. If a dog shows signs of diarrhea or vomiting, what is the cutoff for when they can return? Reasonable policies often require a symptom-free interval of 24 to 48 hours without medication. Ask about the facility's procedures for separating and caring for ill dogs. There should be a designated isolation area and clear communication protocol for owners.

Cleaning routines and disease control Cleaning frequency and products matter. Many viruses survive on surfaces for hours to days, so daily disinfecting of bedding, toys, and high-touch areas is essential. Ask what disinfectant they use and whether it is registered as effective against parvovirus and other hardy pathogens. Good facilities often use a two-stage cleaning process, first removing organic material, then disinfecting. Floors and outdoor areas should be pressure cleaned or power washed regularly, not just swept.

Also ask how toys are rotated and sanitized, and whether the daycare provides communal toys or requires owners to bring their own. Communal toys are fine if the facility can demonstrate a sanitation schedule, but some dogs prefer not to share, and owners should be allowed to supply familiar items.

Emergency preparedness and medical care A thorough answer will describe both on-site capabilities and off-site veterinary arrangements. Ask whether staff are trained to recognize and respond to heatstroke, dehydration, severe cuts, and traumatic injuries. Find out what first aid supplies they keep on site and whether they have established relationships with nearby emergency veterinary hospitals. A typical arrangement pairs the daycare with a 24-hour emergency clinic within 10 to 20 minutes of the facility.

Another important detail is financial authorization for emergency care. Some daycares require you to sign a form authorizing veterinary care up to a certain dollar amount without owner consent, while others will always attempt to contact the owner first. Consider what you are comfortable with and ensure the policy is explicit.

Behavioral management and correction philosophy Ask how staff handle scuffles, resource guarding, mounting, and overstimulation. You are looking for a philosophy that emphasizes prevention, redirection, and safe separation, not punitive methods. For example, removing a dog calmly to a quiet area tends to work better than yelling or quick correction, which can escalate stress. If the facility uses time-outs, ask how they are implemented and how long they last.

Discuss progressive plans for dogs that show repeated problematic behavior. A single incident may not be disqualifying, but repeated aggression should trigger an individualized plan that could include behavior modification, a pause in attendance, or in severe cases, [Dog Daycare Pflugerville](#) a recommendation for private training. Ask whether staff consult with external certified behaviorists for complex cases, and whether the daycare reserves the right to deny service for safety.

Drop-off and pick-up logistics Clear logistics reduce stress for dogs and owners. Ask about drop-off windows, whether late pick-up fees apply, and how they verify identity at pick-up. Many facilities use a secure sign-in system that records arrival and departure times. If you commute or travel, ask whether they offer extended stays or boarding. The difference between dog daycare and dog boarding is significant; boarding requires overnight staffing, bedding, and routines that support sleep and separation anxiety. If the facility offers dog boarding, verify whether the overnight staff is the same team that supervises daytime play, and how they manage quieter hours.

Payment structures, cancellations, and trial days Understand pricing beyond the daily rate. Do they offer packages, multi-day discounts, or membership plans? Ask about cancellation policies and whether unused days roll over. A standard approach is to offer a trial day at a reduced rate or free, to assess compatibility. Be wary of facilities that insist on long-term contracts without an exit option or trial period.

Questions that reveal culture and care Ask what a typical day looks like for a dog, from arrival to pickup. Expect details: morning free play, mid-day nap periods, supervised enrichment, short walks or yard time, and quiet hours. Facilities that provide concrete schedules demonstrate thoughtfulness about dogs' circadian rhythms and the need for downtime.

Another revealing question is how they handle fearful or shy dogs. The best daycares adapt, offering a quieter area and slower social integration. If staff suggest immediate immersion into the busiest group without assessment, that is a red flag.

Two short checklists to use on a visit

1. The essentials to ask at the front desk: required vaccines and timing, staff-to-dog ratio at peak, emergency veterinary partnership, trial day policy, and isolation procedures for sick dogs.
2. Red flags to notice during a tour: dogs confined to crates for most of the day, staff not observing play or visibly distracted, overcrowded play areas, absence of a written health policy, and filthy or strong chemical smells indicating poor cleaning routines.

What you can observe that confirms answers When you visit, watch body language more than words. Play bows, loose bodies, and reciprocal chasing are signs of healthy play. Stiff bodies, pinned ears, hard stares, and continuous mounting or repeated redirected bites may indicate that supervision is poor. Staff should be moving through the group, scanning, and intervening calmly when play escalates. If handlers spend most of their time behind a desk, rather than engaging with dogs, that is telling.

Take note of the facility layout. Are there separate rooms for different sizes or temperaments? Is the outdoor space shaded and securely fenced with double-gated entries? Are indoor surfaces non-slip and easy to disinfect? Look for clear sightlines so staff can see all dogs at once and multiple exits to prevent bottlenecks during emergencies.

Paperwork and contracts that matter Review the enrollment contract carefully. It should include payment terms, cancellation policy, liability release, emergency medical authorization, and a clear behavior policy. The waiver should not absolve the facility from negligence. If the language seems unusually broad or absolving, ask for clarification or consult your veterinarian or an attorney if necessary.

Edge cases and trade-offs Some daycares specialize in high-energy play for athletic breeds. Others focus on calmer, enrichment-driven stays. Neither is inherently better. A Border Collie may thrive in a high-energy environment, while an older, arthritic Labrador will need shorter, gentler sessions. If your dog has special needs such as anxiety, seizures, or mobility issues, a daycare that advertises flexibility but lacks certified staff may not be suitable. If you need boarding plus daycare, verify whether they accept dogs with medical conditions and whether staff can administer medications. Many facilities do, but they will often require clear written instructions and possibly a small additional fee.

Handling a bad experience If you suspect your dog was injured, or returns with unexplained marks or a sudden behavioral change, document everything. Take photos, note times, and request the incident report. A professional daycare has an incident reporting system and will share it with you, along with steps taken. If the facility resists documentation or becomes defensive, consider that a serious sign. You should expect transparency and willingness to follow up.

Red flags that should end the visit Staff who minimize your concerns, inconsistent or vague answers about health protocols, overcrowded play spaces, dogs showing signs of untreated injury or illness, and a lack of emergency partnerships are all reasons to walk away. Trust your instincts when words and sight do not align.

Final advice for decision making Balance objective facts with fit. The right daycare for your dog depends on temperament, health, and your goals for attendance. Try a short trial day, start with one or two days a week, and watch for changes in appetite, stool, and behavior. Some dogs arrive exhausted but content, sleeping deeply that evening. Others come home wound up, which can indicate too much unstructured activity. If problems arise, address them early with the facility and consider a referral to a behavior professional.

Choosing a dog daycare is a small investment that pays dividends in your dog's happiness and your peace of mind. Ask the hard questions, observe quietly, and insist on written policies. The best facilities welcome scrutiny; transparency is part of good care.