



QUESTIONS YOU MUST ASK YOUR DOG WALKER

*Before trusting them
with your special friend!*

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Hello and Welcome!

First of all I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for downloading this document. I know by the very fact you've taken the time to find it (then handed over your email address to get it), your dog is family. There are plenty of dog owners who do not feel like you do (volunteering in local shelters has shown me this heartbreaking fact), but you are one of those pet parents who want the very best for your special friend. I am so thrilled to be in such great company.

Professional dog walking has exploded in popularity over the past 10 years and due to the low barrier to entry, it can be a minefield for pet parents trying to find the best care for their special friends. This sudden influx of new walkers means there are many options for pet parents, but finding the best choice and the right match can be challenging. This guide is here to help.

Newbie dog walkers often overlook the profound trust being placed in them by a pet owner. They are being entrusted to care for what is essentially their client's children. Many regulatory bodies and guidelines assure the safety and wellbeing of children. Unfortunately, the pet care industry doesn't offer the same kind of support for fur children.

You are also unlikely to meet a group of children unleashed on the wild to run, play and swim with only words to control them. They are usually contained in very safe spaces. Dog walkers need to have more than just a love of animals in order to do this safely with minimum risk to the pets in their care.

As you are someone who loves your special friend, I know you're not going to want to entrust just anyone with them. This PDF will give you all the information you need to make the important decision on who will be there for your dog when you can't be.



Before We Get Started...

Being clear on what you are looking for will help you find the best walker for your best friend. Before you pick up the phone (or flick away an email) make a list of what's important to you.

Consider these questions:

1. What kind of services would my dog prefer? Do they get along well with other dogs and enjoy playing in a group? Or would individualised attention suit them better?
2. Does my dog need a lot of exercise, or a little? Do they need a full day trip to the river, or would a 30 minute potty break and a play suit them fine?
3. Would I prefer my dog to have the same walker for every outing or visit? (Some have a team where different walkers cover different days and areas.)
4. Will my dog be going out on the same days each week? (Some walkers have flexibility in their schedules, others have a core group they take out each day.)
5. Will there be times I need to book or cancel at the last minute? (Most professionals need to charge cancellation and last minute booking fees to cover wages and lost revenue.)
6. Is dog walking the only service I need? Or would I prefer to hire someone who can also stay overnight with my dog when I travel?

Of course the Internet is a great place to start when searching for the perfect walker. However, you may also wish to ask friends or family first. They may already have a dog walker they love. You could also ask your groomer, local pet shop or rescue for recommendations. Your trainer may take out a group during the day, as well as training in the evenings and on weekends. Your vet may have qualified nurses who walk dogs part time. This way you get a highly skilled walker you wouldn't normally hear about that may be a great fit for your family.



Once you have researched your options and found the perfect walker/sitter for your family, the next step is to schedule a call with them. Many walkers will need you to make an appointment for the first call as there will be a lot to cover and they will need to give you their undivided attention. Many solo walkers are unable to take calls while out on location for safety reasons.

It is usually easier if you submit a form on the walker's website where some pre-screening may take place. This way the walker can determine where (or if) your dog best fits in before the call-back.

During the call your potential walker should ask you a lot of questions in regards to your dog's behaviour. They should (at the very least) ask about your dog's recall, their behaviour around other dogs, any separation anxiety, any tendency towards rough play or any other issues your dog may have.

You must be absolutely honest at this stage about any medical or behavioural issues your dog may have. Some walkers have training knowledge and some don't. Some are skilled with reactivity and aggression issues and some aren't. There is no point in going ahead with the meet and greet if your walker is not equipped to deal with any particular problems your dog has. It is dangerous to the walker, the group and the public to try and hide any issues your dog may have. Be upfront with your walker so they can make an informed decision as to whether or not they are able to take on your dog.

Aside from overt dog or people aggression, don't worry if your dog's behaviour isn't absolutely perfect. An experienced walker should be able to work with you to a degree or should know of someone you can talk to to manage issues before introducing your dog to the group.

This introductory call is the perfect opportunity to ask any questions you have for the walker. This saves you the time and effort it takes to go forward with the meet and greet if anything is a deal-breaker for you.



Here are the top 12 questions you absolutely must ask your potential dog walker to ensure the safety and wellbeing of your special friend.



Are you a hobby walker or is this a full time business?

The difference between a hobby walker and a professional is straightforward. Caring for your dog is the chosen career of a professional walker while the hobbyist is doing this for a bit of cash on the side. Hobbyists are the walkers who quite often register with apps like Rover or Wag.

While these apps are convenient, they are created by tech companies, not professional pet sitters. There is no training, skill or knowledge required to join these sites. The walkers on them most likely have the best intentions, but aren't likely to have the experience or certifications of a professional. You may get lucky and find a retired vet or someone with a lifetime of pet care walking dogs for the love of it. However it's possible the hobby walker is only in it for what they see as easy money. It will be up to you to ensure your walker is not the latter.

The hobby walker has nothing like the overheads of a professional so they are almost certainly going to be cheaper. Expenses a professional walker will have that the hobbyist will not, include:

- Insurance to protect you and your pets should any mishaps occur.
- Monthly fees for scheduling and notification software so they never miss visits and you are kept up to date on exactly what is happening with your pets at all times.
- Membership to pet-care organisations that provide ongoing education and training so they can provide you and your pets with the best possible service.
- Training courses and books to hone the skills of their trade.
- Certifications like pet first aid, rescue breathing and CPR every two years, to give your pets the best possible chance if injured.
- Legal advice for the contract that keeps all parties safe.
- Business expenses like petrol and other car related costs, treats, equipment, uniform, lockboxes etc.



While there is nothing inherently wrong with someone walking dogs to make some extra money, you need to be sure your dog's wellbeing is their 100% priority. With a hobby walker, there is the chance they could cancel their commitment to you for personal reasons, such as a week away to visit a friend.

With a professional walker this is their business and their livelihood depends on providing you with the best possible service they can. As a professional, they will be there when they say they will, unless there is something unavoidable such as a family emergency.

A hobby walker is more likely to see dog walking as what they are doing until something better comes along, which may leave you facing the prospect of hiring another walker when they find alternative employment.

This can be especially problematic for sensitive dogs, who take time to warm up to a new caregiver and don't take kindly to changes in their routine. You're much more likely to have the same professional dog walker for years, someone who becomes a part of the family, someone who is happy to work with trainers and other professionals in your dog's life to provide them with the best possible care.

A professional walker also brings a wealth of experience and training to the table as they are constantly investing in themselves and their business to do their job to the best of their ability. They view training as a necessity to stay current and are constantly reading, learning and spending time, money and effort to learn new skills. Their reputation and repeat business rely on their availability and professionalism as well as they rely on this to pay their mortgage and feed their kids.

The hobby walker won't have as much incentive to make ongoing training and education a priority.



One of the most important aspects of hiring a full time professional walker is the on-the-job experience that is achieved over time. Coupled with the right training they should easily be able to detect the subtle changes in a dog's body language and demeanour that convey how the dog feels.

This enables the professional walker to read mood and anticipate issues in order to avoid problematic situations. A professional has the skillset to keep the dogs under control while ensuring they all have a fantastic time.

Another positive about hiring a professional is it is much easier to find reviews about their business online. Most professionals actively seek out and encourage clients to review their business, so you will usually find no shortage of testimonials. If a walker is just starting out there may not be as many. If that's the case, be sure to ask for references from at least three happy clients.

Additional questions you may wish to ask to ascertain your walker's professionalism are:

1. How long have you been walking dogs?
2. Are you a member of any dog walking or pet sitting organisations?
3. Have you had any professional training in dog body language or behaviour?
4. Are you pet first aid certified?
5. Where do you see yourself in five years? (The answer should be "walking your dog!").

A dog walker that calls themselves a "professional" should have insurance, extensive terms of service and a working policies and procedures manual in place to protect you, your dog and the public.



Are you a sole trader or do you have a team?

Professional dog walkers generally fall into two groups, the solo walker who works alone or the company that employs a team of staff. Like anything, there are pros and cons to both solo walkers or companies that manage a team.

When you hire a solo walker, you will only ever have to deal with one person and your dog is guaranteed the same walker every outing. This is especially important if your dog is shy or takes time to warm up to people. You only have one person to get to know and they will likely become part of your family, especially if they walk your dog for years.

However, as the name suggests, they work alone, so they don't have anyone to fall back on if they are ill or injured. If there is an emergency on location, they don't have anyone to call to come and help them. You may wish to ask what their backup plan would be if they ever found themselves unable to walk your dog.

If you are working with a company that employs staff, there is a chance you will be dealing with an employee rather than the company owner. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this, care must be taken to ensure the company has a robust hiring and training process and all staff members are background checked by a third party. The company should have regular training sessions that work together with a comprehensive policies and procedures manual. This way, you will be guaranteed to experience the same level of care from all members of staff.

There are different classifications for staff members you need to look out for when working with a company. Some may work exclusively with employees, others may hire independent contractors. There is a big difference between the two and you will need to talk to the company owner about which they work with.



Employees are hired by the owner or senior staff members and are considered an official part of the company. An employer will provide their employees with uniforms and all other equipment they need to do their job. The company owner will have insurance to protect the client's home and pet while in the care of the employee. There should be a robust interview and on-boarding process to ensure only the very best people for the role are invited to join the company.

It should be standard practice for an employee to receive extensive, ongoing training and support so they uphold the reputation and goodwill fostered by the company. There should be a minimum of two weeks training where they shadow senior staff on location with the dogs. Managers should take the employee through leash handling, safety protocols, dog body language education and more. An employee will be introduced to all the pets they are going to be working with and training should be provided on entering and securing every home they visit.

Independent contractors (ICs) are classified as self-employed so they are not a part of the company they are working with. ICs are free to work with as many dog walking companies as they wish, as well as to work for themselves if they choose. By law, the company owner is not permitted to train an IC, provide them with an employee manual or have them follow company policies and procedures. The company owner has no right to control how an IC does their job in any way. The owner is able to offer suggestions, but is not legally allowed to follow up to see if these directions are followed.

This will mean every IC working with the company will do things their own way. There are no standards set for the service provided to every client.



The only upside of ICs for a company is the fact that they're cheaper to hire as they pay their own tax and are not entitled to any benefits. The company owner usually pays them a flat rate for their services.

It will be up to you to decide whether or not you allow a company that uses self employed contractors to care for your dog. If you decide to work with a company that uses ICs, ensure you meet the specific IC you will be working with. Your conditions for the care of your pets are the only specifications ICs are legally allowed to follow. You will need to ensure they are extensive and detailed down to the letter.

Some extra questions you may wish to ask before working with a dog walking company may include:

1. How long has the person who will be caring for my dog been working with you?
2. What is your interview and on-boarding process?
3. What are your emergency training processes?
4. Are all your team members first aid trained?
5. Do you work with independent contractors or employees?

The company should have a system where they are always bringing new staff into their training before they need them, to ensure only the most caring people are hired. You may wish to ask what their processes are to keep their application list full, so they never find themselves having to hire out of desperation if someone leaves suddenly.



What is involved when my dog is out with you?

No two dog walkers are quite the same, all operate differently and offer different services. Some only do individual walks, some take groups to the park, others do day trips to local hiking trails. Some have been around for years, some have only just started out.

Some people are dedicated walkers, while others provide a wide range of pet care services (such as in-home care and overnight pet sitting). Some offer in-home doggy daycare and take the dogs out on a walk as part of that service.

Once you have chosen a pet care provider, it will be important to work out where your dog will be going, what they will be doing and if this experience is going to fulfil your dog's mental and physical requirements for the day. If your dog requires a lot of exercise, you'll need to find out if the walk provided is going to be substantial enough to work out their energy so they are left tired and happy.

If your dog is not so physical but instead prefers more mental stimulation, a walker that offers training games, enrichment activities and on-location play may be more suited to your needs.

If your dog will be joining a group, you will need to learn about the group members your dog will be out with on a regular basis. There should be an upper limit to the amount of dogs the walker takes out at one time, so you know they are getting the personalised attention they need. The walker should have a size guide in their policies and procedures to ensure dogs are no more than 2-3 times bigger than any other group member.



If your dog has any behaviour quirks (and don't they all to some degree?) it will be important to work out how they will be dealt with. You will need to find out whether or not the walker's behaviour management style aligns with yours, or if you have differing views. For example, it would not work if your style of training centres around positive reinforcement and theirs involves leash jerks and alpha rolls.

It will be important to get on the same page about training styles from the very beginning.

If your dog is not happy in the car, you may wish to ask how long they expect your dog will spend traveling to and from the locations they will be visiting. If your walker only takes dogs out on solo walks, chances are they will take your dog out from your home or drive them a short distance to explore their local area. However group outings will require travel to pick up their doggy friends. This can add up to an hour of travel time each way.

If your dog loves nothing more than to stare out the car window rather than sitting at home on their own then travel time adds to the excitement rather than detracting from it. However if your dog is visibly uncomfortable or gets motion sick on car rides, long travel times may not be for them.

While some walkers have vans with cages to contain dogs, some will transport pets in their personal vehicles. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this, care must be taken to ensure the dogs are safely contained so they don't obstruct or distract the driver in any way. If a 27kg dog is loose in a car that has an accident at 48kph, their body becomes a 1224kg projectile. If not harnessed in the dog could be badly injured and/or be a danger to fellow passengers. They could also escape the vehicle after an accident and be at risk from oncoming traffic.



Dogs should always be leashed into a vehicle by the main seat belt attached to a crash tested safety harness. Seat belts clipped to a dog's neck are marketed as safe, but in reality they are a danger to the dog. If clipped to the dog's collar the weight of their body flying out from under them is enough to break their spine at the point of full extension of the belt.

Dogs should also never be placed in the front seat of a car with airbags as these can kill dogs when they deploy, even if the dog is crated.

The walker should use crash tested safety harnesses, even if dogs are contained in a crate. If not, they could hit the sides of the crate with tremendous force. The walker should either supply the safety harness or require you to purchase one and fit it to your dog. They should require your dog to wear it every time they take them out. If not, there is the risk your dog is not being safely transported in the walker's vehicle.

Some other questions you may wish to ask about what is involved when your dog is out with the walker include:

1. How is my dog kept safe while they are being transported in your vehicle?
2. What are your safety protocols in regards to pick up and drop off?
3. What treats do you provide? (Dogs with allergies may need specific treats.)
4. Will all the dogs be the same size or will there be bigger dogs in the group?

It may also be a good idea to talk about any behavioural problems that may exist within the group.



How do you keep in touch with me about my dog?



Every walker will have a different method of communication to let you know what has happened while out and about with your dog. Some may have dedicated software they use for dog walks while some have this combined with the scheduling software they use. Others may leave a handwritten note while others post all the photos of the trip to social media after they have finished the walk.

There are several apps the dog walker can use that track the movements of the group and capture everything that happens that day. This will include a map complete with GPS tracking, pick up and drop off times, photos of the walk and notes from the dog walker. When the walk is ended the app will send all this information in a neat little package to the dog owner. This is the best for the pet owner as there is complete accountability on behalf of the dog walker, you will know exactly what has happened, what time and where.

Some additional questions you may wish to ask your walker about their notification systems include:

1. Do you use software to track your outings with the dogs?
2. How will I know what time you pick up and drop off my dog?
3. Will I receive photos and video of the outing?

You may also wish to ask your dog walker if they use a dog walking app to track their outings.



Do you carry insurance to protect everyone involved?



No one likes insurance, but everyone likes what it provides. Peace of mind is priceless and a professional walker should have carefully researched, comprehensive insurance that protects all involved.

This insurance cover should work in with their terms and conditions that outline what is and what is not covered when it comes to your pets and your property.

Some questions you may wish to ask about the dog walker's cover are:

1. Do you have public liability insurance to protect third parties?
2. What is covered when it comes to injury of my pet?
3. What happens if my dog injures another dog or destroys property?
4. Is my property covered from accidental damage by you or your employees?
5. What are your procedures to deal with employee theft?

Unforeseen accidents can happen and a good policy should cover injury to your dog while in the walker's care and/or property damage caused by the dog. The walker should bring their insurance information to leave with you when you meet but if not you may wish to see their policy to ensure everything that should be is covered.



Do you have policies and procedures in place?



A professional dog walker will have a comprehensive manual that outlines every aspect of every service they provide down to the most minute detail. This ensures a standard of service that you can expect from every member of staff. This is where you will find all the answers to any questions you may have about the running of the walker's business.

Having a comprehensive policies and procedures manual will ensure consistency across all services, week in week out, for the duration of their service.

Questions you may wish to ask in regards to their policies and procedures may include:

1. What are your policies regarding inclement weather?
2. Will you walk my dog on weekends or public holidays? Is there an extra charge for this?
3. What is the time frame for walks?
4. Do you walk dogs that are in season?
5. What is your policy regarding intact dogs?
6. What happens if my dog becomes wet or muddy while out on location?
7. Do you administer medication and does this cost any extra?
8. What are your views on leaving dogs in cars while you pop into the supermarket?

If you can tell they are making the answers to these questions up on the spot the chances are there are no policies and procedures in place.



What are your safety procedures?

A professional walker will have an entire chapter in their policies and procedures dedicated to ensuring the safety of your dog while they are transferred from your home to their car, while they are in transit or while out on location.

Your walker should have detailed information that specifies down to the letter what happens in the case of a lost pet, a natural disaster, lost or stolen keys, vehicle break-ins, dog attacks, injury to a team member, etc.

The walker should regularly train and test staff so they know automatically what to do should any emergency situation arise.

On their client intake form, or in the software they use to store your information, the walker should have asked for the following:

- At least one emergency contact should they not be able to reach you.
- A spare key to your home to be placed with that emergency contact.
- Your pet's vet information and preferred emergency vet.
- An amount you will guarantee the vet to go ahead with any procedure should they not be able to reach you to approve.
- Any known allergies to medications or otherwise they should be aware of.

If they don't have any of this information on file the concern is there are no policies and procedures in place in an emergency. In this case the walker will need to think of what to do on the fly while not necessarily in a state of mind to think rationally.



Every professional walker should have undergone pet first aid training and have put staff through the same course before they ever take dogs out on location. These are usually day-long courses that empower pet care providers with the knowledge to handle any emergency situation.

Topics covered include (but are not limited to):

- Rescue breathing and CPR
- Shock
- Hypothermia
- Poisoning
- Broken bones
- Heat stroke

Participants of the course should be awarded a certificate that is usually valid for two years. It's a good idea to ensure your walker's certificate is current and the information is still fresh in their mind.

Additional questions you may wish to ask about their safety procedures include:

1. Have you ever had to deal with an emergency? What happened?
2. What are your procedures in the case of a lost dog?
3. If my pet is injured and you cannot reach me, what are your procedures in that situation?
4. What happens if there is a natural disaster of any sort while you are walking my dog?

Safety should be paramount to your walker and they should have extensive processes to deal with any given situation that may arise.



Do you have a contract that protects all parties involved?

The walker should have a contract in place that clearly states their obligations to you and establishes liability and responsibility for anything that may happen. A contract will provide transparency so everyone will know what to expect and where they stand in any given situation. It will help you ascertain whether or not the business is a good fit for you and your pet.

The contract usually starts by outlining the services the walker provides in detail, including cost and time frames. You should have a very clear understanding of all services and what to expect from every visit.

Once the services have been introduced and there are no doubts as to what you can expect, the walker should define their policies for billing, pricing and payment of these services. You should know exactly how you will be billed and how you can pay, whether or not payment is due before service or if you have a certain window of time to make payment. It should let you know what will happen if payments are late and if there are additional charges for anything. There should be clear guidelines for after-hours visits, weekends and holiday walks and any extra fees these may incur.

The client contract also establishes policies and procedures. Standard policies include cancellation conditions, last minute bookings, dogs in season policies, intact males, who is responsible for vet fees, the complaints process, vaccination schedules, flea and worm policies, who is responsible for any extra expenses incurred while walking dogs and more.



It is important for your dog walker to have you read, fill in and sign a veterinary release form as part of their contract. This should include detailed information on your pet's medical history as well as a vet payment authorisation amount on your behalf.

Some dog walkers may have you sign an off-leash consent form that absolves them of any liability should anything happen while your dog is off-leash. If you would prefer your dog remains on leash this will need to be discussed during the initial call as some walkers only take out off-leash groups.

Other questions you might like to ask about their service agreement include:

1. What are your cancellation policies and are there any extra fees involved?
2. Do you charge extra for visits in the evenings and on weekends?
3. Is there a surcharge on public holidays?
4. What equipment do you provide?
5. What are your policies regarding off-leash walks?

The walker should bring a copy of this contract to the meet and greet or have you electronically sign if they add you to their client portal. The contract could be made up of some or all of the following:

- Service agreement.
- Policies and procedures.
- Key intake form.
- Medical history and vet information form.
- Off-leash consent form.

If these are paper, the walker should have you sign two sets of forms and leave one with you so you always have it to refer back to.



Do you offer a meet and greet and what is involved?

Most walkers offer a free meet and greet, others may charge a fee to help cover the cost of their (or their employee's) time. Some may have a system that waives the fee if at least one booking is made with the company. In any case, it is imperative for your walker to meet you and your dog at your home (with no obligation to you) before they take your dog out on location. The meet and greet is a great opportunity for you to assess the walker and get a feel of whether or not they will be a good fit to work with your family. This is the perfect opportunity to go over the questions in this report.

Before the meet and greet the walker should have had you fill out their online profile and have all the information they need about your dog on hand. Part of the purpose of the meet and greet is to go over this information and answer any questions you may have. They should bring a copy of their policies and procedures, contract and company insurance policy.

When the dog walker arrives, watch how your dog reacts to them and vice versa. Unless your dog is reactive or very shy, they should absolutely love the walker. Walkers usually smell of multiple dogs and treats!. The walker should also be very excited to meet your dog. They may try to keep a lid on their reaction so as not to send your dog's energy levels through the roof but you should see pure joy in their eyes when meeting a new friend.

During the meet and greet the walker should ask a lot of questions about your dog. This is the time where you need to be honest about any behavioural issues your dog may have. If your dog is reactive to other dogs and has shown signs of aggression in the past, you must share this with the walker. You need to know if the walker has the specific skillset to work with a particular behavioural issue your dog may have.

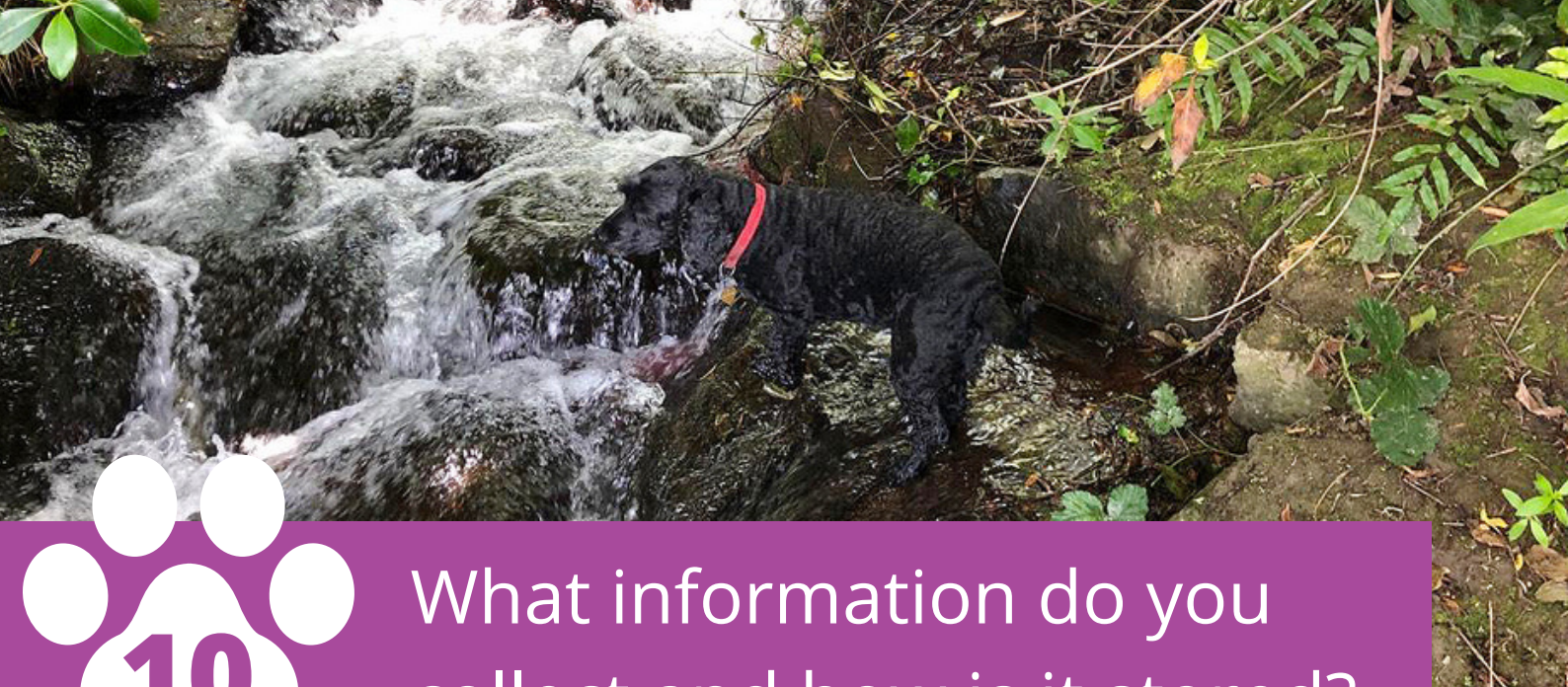


The walker should either take your dog out on their own (or with you if you wish) to a spot where they are likely to meet other dogs of varying colours, sizes and personalities. The walker will need to see how your dog reacts on leash with other dogs and see if there is a fear response to other breeds and sizes.

Questions the walker should ask you during the meet and greet include (but are not limited to):

1. What are your commands for the basics (sit, stay, come)? If your dog doesn't reliably respond to these commands the walker may wish to ensure further training or work with you themselves.
2. What is your command for 'leave it?' This is especially important to know should your dog pick up something on location that is hazardous or toxic.
3. What does your dog do when they meet other dogs? Especially important to know how they are going to fit in with the group and how they are going to react to other dogs on location.
4. How does your dog react when another dog tries to take away something they are playing with?
5. May I see your dog's vaccination schedule?

It's wise to pay attention to the questions you are asked as this will give you a good idea of what goes on at the meet and greet with other group members as well. For example, if your walker doesn't ask about behavioural issues, there's a chance they may miss something with other group members that could put your dog at risk. While asking your own questions is a good idea, paying attention to what you are asked is important too.



What information do you collect and how is it stored?

In this day and age where almost all businesses collect sensitive data at some point, it's important to know how this information is stored and whether or not it is at risk from data breaches. We've all heard news of hackers gaining access to a server where sensitive information is stored. It can then be held to ransom or made publicly available to other hackers to use for nefarious purposes.

It's for this reason it's very important to ascertain which software is used and how that company collects and encrypts your sensitive information.

It's also important to find out how your data is accessed and whether or not these devices have a login to view this information. Phones that have scheduling apps installed containing client data need to be secured with a password, fingerprint or facial recognition to be totally secure. If a phone is lost or stolen and it is not protected, anyone picking it up has access to all names, addresses, keypad and lockbox numbers of all clients, together with detailed information of visit schedules. If a car is broken into, it's possible they also have access to client keys if lockboxes aren't used.

Unfortunately at this point it becomes less about the data breach and more about the safety of the pets. Anyone accessing the phone will be able to see when pets are booked in for holiday visits so will know when they are likely to be at home alone. They will see which days pets are usually taken out so they will know when the home is most likely to be empty. It's important to find out how seriously the developers of the software the walker uses to store your information take the security of your data. You'll also need to find out how the devices used to access the software are protected as well.



If by some chance your dog walker is still using paper forms to collect your information, you will need to ask how this is stored and where it is kept. A combination safe is best but a locked filing cabinet in a wardrobe or basement where it is bolted to the floor should be sufficient.

If the walker keeps spare keys on the same premises these should be stored separately, preferably in a safe. The keys should have corresponding key intake forms which should be stored somewhere different again to make it more difficult for all information to fall into the wrong hands.

Some additional questions you may wish to ask your walker about data safety are:

1. If paperwork is collected with my personal information, how is this stored?
2. If the information collected is digital, is the server secure?
3. Are the devices with the app for the scheduling software secure?
4. Is my information ever shared with third parties?

If the walker uses scheduling software, ask for the name of the company. You may wish to do a search for “company name data safety” to see their policies for keeping your information safe.



How are walks scheduled and how will I pay?



Most professional dog walkers will use software to manage their schedule. This can be as simple as an Excel spreadsheet through to a scheduling and invoicing system specifically designed for pet care providers. You may still encounter a walker who uses a diary system but it is unlikely.

A dedicated scheduling and invoicing system makes life much easier for the dog walker. The walker will need to pay a monthly fee for this. An online scheduling system ensures the walker is where they need to be and when.

Dedicated software makes life much easier for you as well. You are able to log in to a portal and book walks online (or through an app) then the walker approves the walk their end. An invoice is generated and with a click the walker is able to email this to you. The walk then appears in the walker's weekly schedule. You are able to view at a glance where your dog is booked in and at what time.

Some extra questions you may wish to ask the walker about their booking system include:

1. What is your booking process?
2. Will I be able to choose a specific walker?
3. How will I cancel if required?
4. What sort of notice do you need to schedule/cancel walks?
5. What methods of payment do you accept?

Many scheduling systems include a payment processor for credit cards so if this method of payment is important you may wish to ask about that.



What are your access policies and how are keys managed?



If a walker is solo they may carry the keys they need for the day. They should ask you for two sets of keys, one to be kept on them and one to keep at their home or office in case of loss or damage. They should also require you to place a key with an emergency contact in case they are unable to reach your pet for any reason such as personal illness or natural disaster.

If the walker manages staff, key handovers start to become problematic. They may need to move to a system where the keys are stored on your property, such as in a combination lockbox. If this is the case, the walker should supply you with a lockbox to use.

If keys are managed by the walker they should have you fill out a key handling form which makes up part of the intake form. If paper key handling forms are kept on the same premises as the client intake forms these should be kept separate from each other. These forms contain the names, addresses, and keycodes of all clients. They need to be kept somewhere very safe, such as an underfloor vault or safe.

Some extra questions you may wish to ask your walker about key handling include:

1. Do you use lockboxes or carry keys?
2. If you use lockboxes, do you keep the combination safe by using encrypted software on password protected phones?
3. How many keys do I need to supply?
4. If you carry keys, how are they stored at your office or in your car?
5. If you have staff, how do you manage the handover of keys?



So there you have it!



While these questions will help you make your decision, it's also important to trust your instincts. How does the dog walker act with your dog, are they a calming presence? Do they make you feel comfortable? Do they treat you with respect? Or do they talk down to you? All these factors will affect your relationship moving forward, so trust your gut feeling on whether or not they will be a good fit.

Thank you for taking the time to download and read this document. I hope you have found it helpful in your search for the best possible fit for your furry family. If you have any questions please feel free to reach out on lesley@vipets.co.nz. Take care and talk soon!

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Enriching and stimulating off-leash doggy day trips include bush walks, forest trips, beach, lake and river swims, cross country excursions, play sessions and more. Doggies go out to decompress with no more than five friends so they receive plenty of one-on-one play, attention and affection.

