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Pet Sitting Guidelines

Section One:

What to Look for in a Professional Pet Sitter

Pet owners should consider the following list of items when searching for a professional pet sitter to care for their pets and home in their absence.

General business issues

- 🐾 The pet sitter visits the client's home before the first pet sitting assignment to meet the pets and get detailed information about their care.
- 🐾 The pet sitter presents himself or herself in a professional manner. He or she should give you his or her undivided attention, be courteous, interested and well informed.
- 🐾 Pet sitter conducts business with honesty and integrity and observes all federal, state and local laws pertaining to business operations and animal care.
- 🐾 Your pet sitter should have liability insurance, and if the pet sitting company employs pet sitters, bonding may be necessary as well.
- 🐾 Does the pet sitter have a business license, if it's required? Please note there is no occupational license for pet sitters, however, a business license may be required to own and operate a business in your locale.
- 🐾 The pet sitter provides a service contract, and goes over specific services and their associated fees.

Issues specifically related to your pets and pet sitting visits

- 🐾 Observe your pets' reactions to the pet sitter. They need to be comfortable with whoever comes into your home to care for them.
- 🐾 Does pet sitter seem genuinely interested in learning as much as possible about your pets? This includes health issues, temperament, eating habits, exercise, etc.
- 🐾 Does the pet sitter have a back-up plan? This is essential in case the pet sitter becomes ill, injured, or in any way incapacitated and unable to care for your pets.
- 🐾 Does the pet sitter have a contingency plan for pet care in case of inclement weather or natural disaster?
- 🐾 In case your pet has a health emergency, does the pet sitter have a list of emergency veterinarians in case yours is unavailable?
- 🐾 Is the pet sitter knowledgeable about general pet issues, pet first aid, and current concerns (i.e. pet food recalls)?
- 🐾 Does the pet sitter have experience caring for the types of pets you have?
- 🐾 Will the sitter be taking another pet sitter, friends, or children or their own pets to visits? Regardless of whether you do

Other important issues

- 🐾 Pet sitter keeps regular office hours and answers clients' inquiries promptly.
- 🐾 What is the pet sitter's general availability? Do they work on holidays? Weekends? All year around?
- 🐾 How long has the pet sitter been in business?
- 🐾 Ask the pet sitter some pointed questions to determine their experience: What would the sitter do if they arrived and couldn't find the cat? What would the sitter do if there was a storm and they couldn't get to the house right away? What if the pet was injured and required veterinary care?
- 🐾 Some pet sitters ask clients to confirm their trip prior to leaving and again when they return home. Ask your pet sitter what, if any, confirmation procedure he or she uses.
- 🐾 The pet sitter keeps interactions with clients confidential.

References

- 🐾 Pet sitter should be able to provide at least three local references.
- 🐾 Check with the Better Business Bureau and the state Attorney General's office to make sure there haven't been any complaints filed.

The following are not essential, but may indicate a higher dedication to excellence

- 🐾 Does the pet sitter volunteer for any pet related groups?
- 🐾 Is the pet sitter a member of any industry trade groups or networking groups?
- 🐾 Is the pet sitter involved in any public education, does he or she write a column for a local pet magazine, teach pet related classes?
- 🐾 The pet sitter provides the client with a service feedback form

The above list was compiled with input from professional pet sitters who are also PetsitUSA.com business members. Many of them have been in business for a number of years and are recognized as experts in their local communities, and beyond. Additionally, for these pet care professionals, pet sitting is not simply a job, but more of a way of life. And as such, a common goal shared by all is upholding and improving the standards of the industry by educating pet owners.

Section Two: Client Best Practices

The following tips come from talking with pet sitters, dog walkers, and dog daycare owners over the years, and hearing about situations that they have faced with their clients. This may seem like a lengthy list of things to remember, but if you keep these things in mind you'll be helping your pet sitter, dog walker, or dog daycare personnel provide the very best care possible for your pets. And rest assured, the person caring for your pets has a much longer list of things to do than you do!

Be prepared for your initial meeting.

When you meet with your pet care provider for the first time, be sure to have the information available that may have been requested. This will probably include paperwork that was sent to in advance, keys, a garage door opener if necessary, a gate, alarm codes, or key cards. You may also be asked to show proof of vaccination.

If your pet care provider sends you paperwork to complete in advance, it's a good idea to highlight information you're unsure about, or simply make a list to refer to when you meet the pet sitter for the first time. And of course, if there's something not on the paperwork that you have questions about, be sure to make a note of that also. Completing the paperwork ahead of time will enable you and your pet care professional to go over things in a more leisurely way when you meet for the first time.

Being prepared will make a good first impression on the person you ask to care for your pets. And let's face it; people enjoy doing business with people who are prepared...it'll make things go more smoothly for everybody involved!

Be sure to provide contact and emergency information.

Give your pet sitter or dog walker the phone number, email address, or other contact information where you'll be while away so they will be able to get in touch with you in case of





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emergency. Ideally this should be in your pet care providers' hands before you ever leave home.

Be honest about your pets' health and behavior.

When you meet with a pet sitter, dog walker, or dog daycare for the first time, be honest about your pets' health and behavior. If your dog tends to be aggressive, withdrawn, afraid of storms, or has other characteristics that are worrisome, your pet care professional will need to know these things. It's understandable that as a pet owner, you may be hesitant to mention these things but many pet care providers have dealt with issues like these and will be able to work with your pet. If not, they may be able to suggest alternatives that will be more suited to you and your pet.

Book services at least 2 weeks in advance.

Whenever possible, call your pet sitter at least 2 weeks prior to the time you'll need their services. For pet sitting services during the holidays, even more notice is advisable since most pet sitters end up turning clients away at this time of year. Please don't assume that because you've used a particular pet sitter in the past that she'll have room for you if you call at the last minute.

Cancel services as far in advance as possible.

Everyone knows that things happen and that plans change at the last minute, but whenever possible be sure to cancel with your pet sitter or dog walker as soon as you know you won't need their services. In essence, you have reserved a certain amount of time with your pet care provider; time they cannot spend with someone else's pets. The courtesy of canceling early allows them to book someone else at that time. Keep in mind, that many dog walkers and pet sitters will charge a fee if cancellation is made within a certain number of days of the scheduled service, so be sure to ask about their cancellation policy.

Be flexible with your requests.

While your pet care professional's goal may very likely be to give you and your pets such wonderful service that you'll feel like you're her only client, chances are she has many others. When you speak with her, let your preferences be known but know that flexibility is the key. Her goal is to give you and your pets the best possible care. Although it may be your preference to have someone visit your pets at 7 a.m. sharp every morning during your absence, she may have five or six other morning clients and will need to schedule her visits according to route, pets' needs, and time. And at any time, unforeseen circumstances may arise that would prevent your pet sitter or dog walker from arriving at the exact specified time.



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Rest assured though, they will do their best to see to it that your needs and preferences are met.

Understand that extra services require extra time.

Pet sitters and dog walkers are constantly budgeting their time and readjusting their schedule to accommodate things that come up unexpectedly. And while many will offer to do extras to make your home look lived in, their main focus is on your pets. Unless you've spoken with your pet sitter in advance about additional services, don't assume she'll be available to do them if you leave a laundry list of items without asking first. It puts her in an uncomfortable position, and because of time involved, could compromise the time she spends with your pets.

While most pet sitters are more than happy to do extra services on occasion, keep in mind that there may be extra charges involved. It's not that your pet sitter is trying to nickel and dime you, but some tasks that take you no time at all, may take more time for her simply because they're not routine tasks for her.

Inform your pet sitter or dog walker of any houseguests.

If anyone will be in your home while you're away, discuss it with your pet sitter or dog walker. Many will not enter a home if they see someone is at your home that they don't know or aren't expecting. At first this may seem unreasonable but there are some very good reasons why pet sitters have this policy.

The number one issue is safety, for the pet sitter and for your pets. If your pet sitter or dog walker were to walk into a home that's being robbed it could prove deadly. He or she may also walk in on someone who is at the home for legitimate reasons, creating at best an awkward encounter, requiring an explanation by both parties.

In addition to the safety reasons for not wanting to enter a home when someone is there, it puts your pet sitter in an uncomfortable position if your houseguest says they'll care for your pets. They may mean well, but keep in mind that you've contracted service with your pet sitter or dog walker, and the decision to cancel that service can only come from you unless you've made other arrangements with your pet care provider.

Confirm your travel plans and pet sitting services.

Call your pet sitter before you leave town as one last confirmation that your trip is going as scheduled. There have been cases involving pet owners booking the wrong dates by mistake, or the pet care business adding them to their calendar on the incorrect dates. Calling your pet sitter just before you leave will ensure that you both have the correct dates.



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Be sure your pet sitter or dog walker has the necessities.

Make sure you leave enough food, medications, treats, or other food items your pet will need while you're away. Other supplies that your pet sitter may need might include paper towels, leashes, carrying cases or other items. See our Pet Owner's Checklist to help jog your memory.

Keep your pet sitter, dog walker, or dog daycare informed of any changes.

If you call on the services of a professional pet care business repeatedly, you'll want to be sure they are aware of any changes in your pets' health, feeding instructions, or behavior. It's also important to inform them of any changes in your home such as a new alarm system, new keys, lighting, etc.

Pay your pet care bill as agreed.

Many pet sitting businesses will require payment to be left for them to pick up on their first visit with your pets. Dog walkers and dog daycares often request payment in advance. Find out what the policy is for the pet care business that will be caring for your pets and be sure to pay your bill as requested. If it becomes necessary to contract last minute or extra services, be sure to check what the payment method will be for those as well, as they may be handled differently than regularly scheduled services.

If you have concerns, contact your pet care provider as soon as possible.

Whether you return home after a two-week vacation or a long day at work and notice something that concerns you, call your pet care professional immediately. You and the person caring for your pets will be better able to help resolve any issues or misunderstandings if you're able to talk about it while it's fresh in your minds.

Chances are pretty good that your pets have already won the hearts of the person who'll be taking care of them. With a little bit of planning and understanding you can do the same!

Section Three: Preparing Your Pet

- 🐾 Ensure that there will be enough food, treats, kitty litter, etc. for the time you will be away.
- 🐾 Let your pet sitter know where your dog's leash is kept.
- 🐾 If you have a carrier for your pet, let your pet sitter know where it is kept.
- 🐾 If your pet is on medication, notify your pet sitter ahead of time.
- 🐾 Leave detailed instructions on its use, even if you tell your pet sitter verbally how it's administered.
- 🐾 Put ID tags on each of your pets.
- 🐾 Provide outdoor pets with plenty of water, shelter, and a secure enclosure.
- 🐾 Leave toys for your pet to play with while you're away.
- 🐾 Let your vet know in advance that you will be out of town and that a pet sitter will be caring for your pets. Many pet sitters will have you fill out a form detailing the type of care you'd like your pet to receive if you cannot be reached.
- 🐾 Most pet sitters will require you to complete a veterinary release form. However, it's also a good idea to give your vet the name of the person who will be caring for your pets while you're away. This is especially important if your pet has a health condition that needs to be watched.



Prepare your home

- 🐾 Inform your pet sitter of anything that may be out of the ordinary (sinks that don't drain properly, toilet that overflows, etc.).
- 🐾 Show your pet sitter where the thermostat is and how to operate it. Be sure to leave it set at a comfortable temperature for your pets while you're gone.
- 🐾 If anyone will be in your home during your absence, let your pet sitter know. Because of safety concerns, many pet sitters will not enter a house if they see someone there. Also, be aware that many pet sitting businesses will not accept jobs if they are requested to share pet care responsibilities with others, or if someone else will be in the home while they are caring for your pets.
- 🐾 For dogs that stay outdoors, secure the yard and lock any gates.
- 🐾 Potentially dangerous plants or decorations should be put somewhere that your pets won't be able to get to them. Keep this in mind especially during the holidays when Christmas trees and other decorations are on display.
- 🐾 Place cleaning supplies where they will be easily accessible if needed.



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- 🐾 If you rent, give your landlord your pet sitter's name in case of emergency. Give your pet sitter the landlord's name as well.
- 🐾 If your pet sitter's first visit will be after dark, be sure to leave an outside light on.

Contact information

- 🐾 Prior to your departure, give your pet sitter information on how you can be contacted. If for some reason your pet sitter were unable to get into your home, leaving the information on your kitchen counter would be useless. Therefore, it is best to provide your pet sitter with this information before you leave.
- 🐾 If you will not be able to be contacted while you're gone, be sure to provide the name and phone number of someone who will be able to make decisions on your behalf.