

CHOOSING A DOGGY DAYCARE

Doggy daycares can be a wonderful source of enrichment and exercise for social dogs who love to play! Choosing which daycares to trust with our precious pups can be a difficult decision because we want our dogs to be happy and well taken care of during our absences.

While an ideal daycare would hit all the “green light” answers, you may need to pick and choose which factors are the most important to you. For us, those factors are group control methods, how groups are separated, handler-to-dog ratio, level of employee training, and cleanliness.

All daycares are different, and there is rarely a one-size-fits-all choice, but the following questions should help you determine if a daycare is right for your dog.

What methods do you use to control group?

- ☐ **Green Light:** Food rewards and time-outs
- ☐ **Yellow Light:** Spray bottles and time-outs
- ☐ **Red Light:** Shake cans, alpha rolls, shock collars, or anti-bark collars



Time-out.

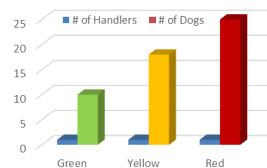
How are groups separated?

- ☐ **Green Light:** Separated by size, play style, and energy level
- ☐ **Yellow Light:** Separated by size
- ☐ **Red Light:** No clear rules for assigning groups or all dogs in same group



What is the handler to dog ratio?

- ☐ **Green Light:** 10 dogs or fewer per handler
- ☐ **Yellow Light:** 10-18 dogs per handler
- ☐ **Red Light:** 18+ dogs per handler



What kind of training does staff receive?

- ☐ **Green Light:** Can give clear requirements and details about handler training, including any certificates staff earn, period of shadowing time before new employees are allowed to be alone with dogs, how staff are taught to handle play groups, and how staff are assessed on their knowledge of dog behavior and play
- ☐ **Yellow Light:** Some details about handler training can be given, but unclear as to exact level of knowledge staff must have to be allowed to be alone with dogs in group
- ☐ **Red Light:** Vague or no details about handler training can be given



How often is the facility cleaned?

- ☐ **Green Light:** Play-groups are cleaned prior to dogs arriving for daycare, during rest period, and after all dogs have left for daycare. Crates are cleaned before a new dog is put in one (may not be cleaned if same dog is in and out of same crate throughout the day)
- ☐ **Yellow Light:** Play-groups are cleaned after all dogs have left for daycare. Crates are cleaned at end of day (unless there is a significant mess, such as potty accidents, mud, or drool), regardless of how many dogs have been in that crate that day
- ☐ **Red Light:** Cannot give detailed cleaning protocol



What happens if my dog misbehaves?

- ☐ **Green Light:** Given a warning (e.g. "be nice") and given a short (~3-5 minutes) time-out if behavior continues. If behavior continues after short time-out, longer time-out (~10-15 minutes) is given
- ☐ **Yellow Light:** Use of spray bottle to deter behavior, no warning given, and given multiple short time-outs if behavior continues
- ☐ **Red Light:** No warning given, use of spray bottle, then use of shake can, then given long-time out if behavior continues



How will my dog be rewarded for positive behavior?

- ☐ **Green Light:** Food rewards and praise
- ☐ **Yellow Light:** Praise
- ☐ **Red Light:** No clear answer given



What is your fight protocol?

- ☐ **Green Light:** Can give specific details about how fights are broken up, including the tools they have available to separate dogs in an emergency (e.g. break sticks, citronella spray, hoses, etc.)
- ☐ **Yellow Light:** Some details about how fights are broken up can be given, but do not have a clear step-by-step procedure
- ☐ **Red Light:** No specific protocol can be given



Can I tour the facility?

- ☐ **Green Light:** Yes, scheduled tours are available where you can see every area your dog will be in
- ☐ **Yellow Light:** Yes, unscheduled tours are available where you can see most areas your dog will be in, including where dogs are crated during rest periods and play-groups
- ☐ **Red Light:** No, tours are not permitted or you are only allowed to see play-group area and not where dogs are crated during rest-periods



What does a behavior assessment entail?

- ☐ **Green Light:** Can give list of exact behaviors that are being observed, including play-style, signs of resource guarding, level of comfort with staff, level of comfort being crated, and reaction to being in group of dogs vs. one-on-one play. Provides written assessment to give to owner
- ☐ **Yellow Light:** Can give list of behaviors that are being observed, but does not have official, standardized assessment form to share with owners
- ☐ **Red Light:** Vague description of behaviors that are being observed and no standardized assessment form



What are other factors that may disqualify a dog from the daycare program?

- ☐ **Green Light:** Severe crate anxiety, discomfort about being in group of dogs (even if okay with one-on-one play or dog parks), extreme discomfort with being touched/handled by staff members
- ☐ **Yellow Light:** Discomfort about being in group of dogs (even if okay with one-on-one play or dog parks)
- ☐ **Red Light:** No factors other than causing injuries



How many incidents until a dog is removed from program?

- ☐ **Green Light:** Immediate removal following any incident resulting in puncture wounds (to another dog or handler); Removal following 2-3 incidents resulting in minor injuries (e.g. scratches, ear tears, etc.)
- ☐ **Yellow Light:** Removal following 2 incidents resulting in puncture wounds; Removal following 3-5 incidents resulting in minor injuries
- ☐ **Red Light:** No clear rules; Removal following 3+ incidents resulting in puncture wounds; No removal protocol for incidents resulting in minor injuries



Will someone be present with dogs at all times?

- ☐ **Green Light:** Yes, except during rest periods when dogs are crated. During rest periods, they will be periodically checked on
- ☐ **Yellow Light:** Most of time during play groups and left unchecked during rest periods
- ☐ **Red Light:** Frequent periods of time when dogs are unsupervised



How frequently are dogs given breaks from play?

- ☐ **Green Light:** Several short breaks throughout the day in safe, secure resting area with individual crates
- ☐ **Yellow Light:** One long break in the middle of the day in safe, secure resting area with individual crates
- ☐ **Red Light:** Non-stop play all day or expectation that dogs will rest in play-area if they get tired



Do you have a plan for a natural disaster?

- ☐ **Green Light:** Can recite clear plan and show you written version of plan
- ☐ **Yellow Light:** Can recite clear plan, but does not have access to written version of plan
- ☐ **Red Light:** Cannot readily recite clear plan



Are adult dogs and puppies grouped separately?

- ☐ **Green Light:** Puppies are in a separate group from adult dogs
- ☐ **Yellow Light:** No separate group for puppies, but puppies must be 6-months of age to be eligible for the daycare program
- ☐ **Red Light:** No age requirement and puppies are in groups with the adult dogs



Important Note:

While we all love the idea of our dogs getting to play all day instead of sitting home alone, daycare is not a good fit for every dog.

Just like with humans, dogs have different socialization needs and preferences. Some dogs love daycare and some dogs would be happier with another midday exercise option, such as a dog walker.

Knowing your dog's preferred socialization environment can help you make the best decision about whether or not doggy daycare is the right option for your pup!

Check out our blog for more info on deciding if daycare is the best option for your dog! [LINK](#)