

How to Be an Ideal Client and Win Your Pet Care Professional's Heart!

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 if sent 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 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 If your dog tends to be aggressive, withdrawn, afraid of storms, or has other characteristics that are worrisome, your pet care professional will need to know these things.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.

Although Southern Paws strives to cover short notice bookings, booking at least 2 weeks in advance is suggested.

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. 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.

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, pet towels to dry your pet after walk if inclement weather, leashes, carrying cases, etc.

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!