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# Is Your Dog a Doggy Day Care Dog?

By Trudi Thorpe

**D**og day care can be a really great way to provide environmental enrichment for your dog when you are at work or otherwise predisposed for extended periods of time during the day. It provides exercise for your dog, which can help in minimising unwanted behaviours at home when you are out, such as barking, digging, chewing and basic dog demolition. It also returns a dog at the end of the day that is often more manageable and a lot more pleasant to be around than one who has been left to try and amuse himself all day!

Dog day care can aid in teaching appropriate play and allows young dogs to develop excellent socialisation skills and manners.

Whilst dog day care provides a valuable service to both dogs and their owners, it is however not appropriate for every dog. In a confined environment where there is a high density of dogs of many different breeds, sizes and temperaments, the dog's state of mind and emotional comfort level may be quite different to when it is in an unconfined environment. This type of confined environment is artificially created and thus, is quite unique. As a result, it can be a confronting experience for the dog and so may elicit unexpected and uncharacteristic behaviours. These may include appearing more fearful than normal, feeling threatened and overwhelmed, becoming over-excited and over-stimulated, and may even elicit behaviours such as resource guarding, fear aggression or even canine bullying, if the situation is not managed with care and sensitivity.

Additionally, if the dog returns to this environment too often, ie more than 2 – 3 times a week, it may begin to become territorial in relation to certain aspects of the environment, eg. certain toys, certain people or even just the general area.

This becomes problematic as the dog may begin to display temperament traits that appear out of character and have not been displayed before.

With this in mind, it's important if you're considering dog day care for your best friend, that the day care you select has an appropriate entry assessment process and knowledgeable staff. This along with owner education will help to ensure that your dog will be a suitable candidate, have a great time and benefit from the whole experience.

So, which dogs generally make good candidates for dog daycare?

- Dogs that are under two years of age that have been well socialised as puppies and love to play with other dogs.
- Dogs that are over two years of age that are easy going, friendly and social.
- Dogs that have had some basic training and understand basic exercises like sit, drop, stay and come.
- Dogs that are happy to be left by their owners and don't suffer any type of separation anxiety.

Dogs that generally don't make good candidates for dog daycare include:

- Dogs with high arousal tendencies. These are dogs that erupt, become stressed or reactive when there is any type of disruption in the environment.
- Dogs that resource guard eg are possessive of toys, food, humans etc.
- Dogs with separation anxiety.
- Dogs that are still intact (not desexed).
- Shy, timid or some older/senior dogs that would much prefer the comfort and security of home.

Before checking your dog into the newest (or even established) Dog Day Care facility, be prepared to ask a few questions and have a few asked of you.

Always ask to have a tour of the facilities. If inspection is not allowed then back away, turn your tail and don't consider this facility. Good operators (and this applies to Boarding Kennels and Catteries too), should welcome inspection.

Does the facility look clean? Smell clean? Do the other dogs look healthy, happy and having a good time?

Who will be looking after your dog/s? Will your dog initially be assessed by a professional trainer to determine if he/she is a suitable candidate for Dog Day Care? Ask what the staffing ratios are—that means how many dogs to a staff member Hint: this ratio should be about the same as child day care. Do the staff have any special training like qualified vet nurses; qualifications in basic animal first aid; dog behaviour training etc.

Accidents and injuries can occur—from scratches and nicks from play fighting, rambunctious activity to more serious dog fights. So find out what action plan staff have for emergencies large and small. Ask who the nearest or preferred vet is. Will they inform you of injuries and mishaps—large and small?

Dogs need to nap several times through the day and so find out if there are suitable nap-time areas. Are there time-out areas—not necessarily a 'naughty spot' but an area where an over-excited dog can chill out for a limited time?

Make sure you inform staff if you have a dog with an illness such as diabetes, epilepsy, injury or other special need. They will need to be prepared for special requirements and as such may determine that your dog is not a suitable candidate for Dog Day Care.



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## Year of the Rat

**R**ats! So often just the mere mention of rats make many people squeamish. Most people associate rats with bad things like disease and poor hygiene. Yet domesticated and well-bred rats can make wonderful pets.

Did you know that rats are considered the number one 'exotic' pet in the US? This is according to a report recently published that claimed rats were followed by ants, tarantulas, cockroaches and scorpions. Given that line-up of 'exotic' pets, the rat is a more cuddly and interactive choice.

Rats have a life-span of two to three years and are social and intelligent. They're easy to tame, are very gentle and their disposition is often described as sweet. Nocturnal by nature, these little guys can also adapt to your household schedule. Rats are colony critters so like to be in the company of other rats. It's recommended that rats are not kept in a solitary state but have other rats as company. At least two rats of the same sex is recommended. A rat on its own will require more attention from you and may even become lonely and depressed.

Although seemingly a low maintenance pet, many rat owners compare their care to that of a more conventional pet like a dog or cat. Rats require attention and at least an hour of exercise per day. Curious and playful, rats make wonderful pets for more compact households.

Like with any pet, keeping rats means that careful consideration needs to be given on the housing, diet and general care. You should do careful research into all these factors as well as sourcing dedicated breeders and attending specialist rat shows. Many rat enthusiasts are keen to answer questions and give advice on the handling and care of ratties. It is also important to seek out a veterinarian who has plenty of experience and expertise in rat health care.

If you're curious about rats and are considering them as a pet then visit [www.ausrfsnsw.com](http://www.ausrfsnsw.com) the official site of the Australian Rodent Fanciers' Society of NSW. There is a wealth of information on the care, housing and dietary requirements of these gorgeous little creatures.



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