



It's my party and I'll cry if I want to!

When Day Care Isn't Right for Your Dog

By Elisabeth Catalano, MA, CPDT-KA, CDBC

Doggie day care is a fantastic solution for dog owners who work many hours. You can drop your dog off on your way to work, knowing that he will be cared for, mentally stimulated and physically exercised all day. He will get to play with his friends, run around and play with toys, climb on all types of fun, doggie safe structures and generally have a grand time! You can stop and pick him up on your way home from work. Then, you both go home and lounge calmly together for the rest of the evening, content in the knowledge that his needs are met. Who wouldn't want that?

Doggie day care began really to fill a human need. Humans want and even need to have dogs in their lives and there are many good reasons for that. There is simply no substitute for the unconditional love and companionship that they provide. Some even have a job helping their human. Having dogs in our lives lowers stress levels and blood pressure, increases immunity, lowers allergic responses in children, staves off depression and anxiety, promotes physical activity, and encourages social interactions. The average person's lifestyle, however, can make having a dog difficult.

Most dog owners work full-time and are away from home many hours a day. To raise a behaviorally healthy dog, you must devote time to them

and in addition to food, water, shelter and medical care, you need to provide physical exercise and mental stimulation. Considering the average adult lifestyle, it can take a village to help raise a dog. That's where doggie day care comes in and a good one can be just the village that a hardworking dog lover needs. Day camp makes it possible for even the busiest of people to share their lives with a furry friend.

So, it seems like dog day care is a win-win for both owner and dog. There are lots of upsides to dog day care, but there is one caution. It isn't right for every dog. While many dogs attend day care routinely and love it, many don't. Most owners are shocked when they find out that their dog doesn't enjoy camp. It is such a great thing, why wouldn't they

like it? There are several reasons why dogs might not enjoy the day care experience.

Like people, not every dog is a social butterfly who wants to attend a party every day, or even a few times a week. This is particularly true for mature dogs (ages 3 years +). While most puppies and adolescents enjoy day care, mature dogs can tire of the constant activity. They can become less tolerant over time and can even become grumpy with their friends. Imagine returning to high school as an adult or going to a high school reunion twice a week!

Dogs that do tend to do well in day care are often young, active dogs that seem to thrive on contact with other dogs. They typically, have lots of energy and never seem to wear out.

The neotenic nature of the domestic dog ensures that they remain playful throughout their adult lives, always ready to enjoy a good game with their favorite human or doggie friend. However, that does not mean that their level of playfulness or their need to associate with lots of dog friends won't still decrease as they age.

Of course, this is not meant to imply that ALL dogs will stop enjoying outings to the dog park, or that they will outgrow day care. Like people, each dog is an individual. Some mature dogs continue to happily attend camp.

First-time day campers that are over two years of age and have either never attended camp before or not since puppyhood can have problems adjusting to the day care environment. They may be overwhelmed with all of the dogs. Older dogs that are not used to being away from their owners can become stressed if they are suddenly placed in an unfamiliar environment, no matter how pleasant.

Dogs that are generally anxious or fearful about new people or places may prefer to remain home in what they deem is their safe space. There is nothing wrong with allowing your dog to lounge at home if that is what they prefer. That is very different from the dog who can't handle down time and needs exercise and mental stimulation.

Other dogs find playing with their own kind so stimulating that they can't even control themselves. This can cause them to behave inappropriately, making misunderstandings highly probable. When their new friends object to their rude behavior, they can get angry which may result in a fight.

This may seem like a no-brainer but, dogs who don't like dogs don't do well in doggie day care. Many people think that by simply giving their dog access to other dogs, they will become less reactive or aggressive. Nothing could be further from the truth. In addition to making the situation worse for the aggressive dog, it puts other dogs at risk. No one sends their dog to day care to get hurt. Similarly, dogs that are aggressive to people will be a risk to every day care worker that they come in contact with.

The important take-away here is that it is important to let your dog decide whether he wants to be in day care or not. Trained day care staff will be honest about whether your dog is right for camp and if it will be enjoyable for everyone.

If day care isn't appropriate, what can you do instead? Take a class! Play with your dog! Get some exercise for both of you by taking a long walk. Being with doggie friends is great but it will never (and should never be) as wonderful as spending time together! 🐾

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