

How to choose a groomer, kennel or dog trainer

Vaccination and hygiene requirements, how to judge a trainer, and what to look at before you leave an animal somewhere

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Pet services are bought on trust and judged on the animal's behaviour afterwards, which is a poor feedback loop. The information that predicts a good outcome - vaccination requirements, how animals are housed, what training method is used - is all available before you book, if you ask.

What it should cost

Grooming is priced by breed, size and coat condition, so quotes over the phone are usually a range at best. Ask what the price includes - bath, clip, nails, ears - and whether a matted coat that takes longer will be charged extra.

Boarding is priced per night, with surcharges for peak periods, medication administration and additional exercise. Ask for the peak-period rate separately, because a Christmas booking is not priced like a Tuesday in May.

Training is priced per class, per course or per session. Ask what happens to unused sessions if you miss a class, and whether the price includes the trainer's own insurance and any certification.

What the law requires

Boarding kennels and catteries are subject to animal welfare standards and municipal requirements, which vary by council. A legitimate operator can tell you what approvals they hold.

Vaccination requirements are set by the facility rather than by law, but a boarding kennel will normally require up-to-date C5 vaccination, generally done at least two weeks before the stay. Ask what they require and what they do if your dog becomes unwell during the stay.

Businesses working with animals should hold public liability insurance, and trainers working with aggressive dogs should have specific cover. Ask.

Red flags

Refusal to let you see the premises.

Vague answers about how long animals are left alone.

A trainer who cannot or will not describe their methods in plain terms.

Any suggestion that aversive or punishment-based methods are standard practice.

No vaccination requirement for boarding.

No insurance.

Pressure to book before you have seen the place.

What good looks like

They invite you to inspect the premises before booking.

Vaccination requirements are stated clearly and enforced.

They have a written protocol for illness or injury, including which vet they use.

A trainer describes a reward-based approach and explains why.

They ask about your animal's temperament and history before agreeing to take it.

What to ask

- "Can I see where the animals are kept or groomed before I book?"
- "What vaccinations do you require, and how far ahead must they be done?"
- "What happens if my dog becomes unwell or is injured while here?"
- "How long are animals left unattended, and where?"
- "What training methods do you use - is it reward-based?"
- "What approvals or licences do you hold?"
- "Are you insured, and can I see the certificate?"

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