

Chapter 16

TAKING CARE OF PET *Nannies*

These days it is not uncommon for your boss to inform you at 6:00 p.m. that you are leaving the next day for a week-long business trip. Unfortunately, your new Brussels Griffon doesn't get a ticket, and your mother is unavailable to care for her granddog. Besides, with your crazy work schedule, you have used up all of your favors with your best friend for the month. The answer is to find a "pet nanny," a loving, educated, responsible pet-care provider who understands that your dog means the world to you, and who can also keep up with your hectic schedule. In return, for her understanding and excellent service, you should pay her well and treat her with dignity.

FINDING AND PREPARING A SITTER

To search for a person to care for your four-legged kid, you can call your veterinarian and ask for a refer-

ral, or contact the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters or Pet Sitters International to find pet-care providers near you. When interviewing a sitter, notice whether she treats your pet in a firm, loving manner and ask if she is trained in animal-handling skills and first aid. Even though your dog may take an instantaneous liking to her, remember that this person is also spending time in your home. Confirm that she is bonded, insured, and has at least three references. She should be willing to completely care for your pet while you're away, even if that means cooking scrambled eggs for his breakfast.

Once you find a choice pet sitter—one you and your dog both feel comfortable with—prepare her for the job. Introduce her to one of your neighborhood friends, explaining that she will be visiting your home while you are away and there's no need to worry if the lights are on or if someone is coming in and out of your home. If you live in an apartment building, have her also meet the doorman from whom she will be obtaining keys. Make sure to review community or building regulations, such as dog-walking paths or service elevators that she should use when with your pet.

To make her job as easy as possible, always leave your pet-care provider your specific 411, the information that she can use to best take care of your dog. Your detailed instructions should include his dislikes and likes, appropriate feeding instructions, walking routes, and emer-

gency instructions. Always leave her your veterinarian's telephone number and the number of a relative or neighbor. Don't forget, an updated itinerary with all of your contact telephone numbers should be left in a prominent place, like on a kitchen counter or attached with a magnet to the refrigerator.

Before you leave for your vacation or business trip, put all appropriate supplies and equipment out for your pet sitter on the kitchen counter or other convenient place. Shop for more than enough food, treats, and poop bags, just in case you have to remain away for a few more days than planned. It is always a good idea to check leashes and collars and replace any old or worn ones that might decide to break while you're away. Who would even want to think about the horrible consequences should your dog get away, get lost, or become injured because of faulty equipment? Also, leave a small sum of money for emergencies and the name and location of the local pet store, should your pet sitter need additional supplies.

If you're so inclined, you can ask your pet sitter to pen a note to you about your dog's daily activities while you are away. This way, you can confirm that he is receiving the care for which you contracted.

ADDITIONAL REQUESTS

Should you cancel your trip or return early, be mindful and considerate of your pet caregiver's time. Try to

cancel at least twenty-four hours in advance. If you do not, expect to pay for services that you did not use. In most cases, pet sitters will have service contracts spelling out all the particulars, including a cancellation policy with which you are obligated to comply.



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Dog Walkers

Unlike a pet sitter who comes to your home to take care of your pet when you are on a business trip or a vacation, a dog walker is a pet professional who will walk your dog, either while you are at work five days a week or at random times on an as-needed basis. When hiring a dog walker, use the same criteria as you would with a pet sitter, and expect the same level of professionalism. Generally, dog-walker compensation is left for them at the end of the work week or after an isolated job is performed. Tipping your dog walker is a recommended “thank you” at least once a year, preferably during the holiday season or at times that you feel it is appropriate. Two weeks’ salary, presented in cash in a holiday card, is an appropriate gift from you; a picture frame, candle, or hat and scarf is a great optional gift from your dog.

If you need your pet professional to perform additional services, such as taking your dog to the groomer or veterinarian or shopping for pet supplies, ask politely and offer to pay an additional amount for her time. Don't forget to thank her for fulfilling your request.

Remember to always pay your pet sitter in a timely manner. Tipping your pet professional is par for the course. Gratuities of fifteen to twenty percent are appropriate per job and a small holiday gift is appropriate for a regular sitter.

Andrew, a very busy executive who often traveled at a moment's notice, had hired Lisette as a dog walker and nanny because she had stellar credentials, impeccable references, and his dog, Sammie, adored her. While Andrew was on a business trip to Asia, Lisette noticed that pieces of plaster had fallen from his ceiling. She immediately called Andrew and left him a message that she thought there might be a problem with his ceiling and that it would be advisable for him to call the building superintendent or a contractor to deal with this potential problem ASAP. Only a few days later, when Lisette opened Andrew's condo door she found that his ceiling had collapsed, ruining thousands of dollars' worth of furnishings, artwork, and personal belongings. She immediately called every number left on his itinerary, including his secretary's number, and explained the situation. Unfortunately, Andrew was involved in a complex

business deal and could not return home immediately. He asked Lisette if she could “handle” things while he was away, such as taking Sammie to a friend’s home to stay and taking a few pictures of the damage to e-mail to him so that he could contact his insurance company. Lisette agreed,

because she knew her job as a pet sitter not only included caring for her client’s pet, but also keeping a watchful eye on his home. And, because of her thoughtfulness and consideration, Andrew rewarded her with a bonus for her beyond-the-call-of-duty attitude and actions.



PET TIP

When interviewing a pet sitter, always confirm that she has a contingency plan, should she become ill or have a situation that prohibits her from caring for your pet.

WHY HIRE A SITTER?

Hiring a professional pet sitter is a viable option for pet owners traveling for business or pleasure. While you are away, your dog can be comfortable in his own home and your sitter can provide him with his regular routine of diet and exercise. With this in-home pet-care solution, you will no longer have to rely on family, friends, or neighbors to take care of your baby while you are away.

Canine Summary:

- * To find a professional pet sitter to care for your dog, contact your veterinarian, the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters, or Pet Sitter International.
- * Your pet sitter should be trained in animal-handling skills and first aid and be willing to care for your pet in your way.
- * Confirm that the animal professional is bonded and insured and has at least three references.
- * Introduce your pet sitter to appropriate neighbors and building staff and review all local health ordinances, building, or community regulations for information she should know.
- * Leave your pet sitter detailed instructions regarding the care of your dog.
- * Put out all appropriate supplies and equipment for your pet sitter, and leave her a small sum of money for emergencies.
- * Ask your sitter to keep a daily log of your dog's activities.
- * Should the pet professional perform additional services, thank her for fulfilling your request, and pay additional charges for her time.
- * Always pay your pet sitter in a timely manner.
- * Tipping your pet sitter fifteen to twenty percent per visit is recommended.



PRODUCT RESOURCE GUIDE

The National Association of Professional Pet Sitters (www.petsitters.org) or Pet Sitters International (www.petsit.com) can help you find a professional pet sitter to care for your pet when you are away from home.

Planet Dog has created a notebook of pet sitting instructions. The fill-in-the-blank sections allow you to include emergency numbers, special instructions, and more. See www.planetdog.com.