



Choosing the *Perfect Dog Walker*

A HANDY REFERENCE
FOR ALL PAW PARENTS



Pawsome™
PET SERVICES | EST. 2015

*Creating the best lifestyle
experiences for busy
Australian pet families*

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Professional dog walking has grown rapidly over the last 10 years. Since anyone these days on Facebook or Instagram can call themselves a dog walker (just like anyone can call themselves a dog trainer), you must know how to pick a qualified person if you're going to hire one.

Pawsome recommends asking questions such as:

- If your company has multiple employees, who will actually be the person walking my dog?
- How many dogs do you walk at once? (*fact: the law in NSW is no more than 4 dogs at a time per walker*) How do you choose which dogs walk with each other?
- What kind of training do you have to walk multiple dogs at a time?
- (*A rare one that not all beginner 'walkers' can answer*) What training do you have in case of a dog escalation? (*fact: we **ARE** trained*)
- What happens when you can't make it?
- What kind of experience do you have with dogs?
- Where will you go on your walks? Will you be taking my dog to the dog park?

Please ask these and as many questions as you can. There is currently no regulating body in Australia and anybody who wants to go into business can plant a flag online to advertise their services. But walking dogs, particularly in groups, takes more than the passion we all share for them. There is specialised knowledge and skill that walkers should possess to ensure the safety of the dogs in their charge, as well as themselves and the other dogs and humans who share the beaches, streets and parks.

Since Pawsome are a team of professional pet carers and dog walkers, we wanted to share some other tips that can help you in your search.



How to find a dog walker

You can always start with a search on Google. Companies with multiple employees should have a website. That being said, some of the best, most reliable and skilled dog walkers we know aren't necessarily advertising their services. So always ask around.

Ask your vet, your groomer, your trainer, or your local pet store owner for recommendations. Who do they hire for their own dogs? Are their clients (with dogs that are similar to yours) using someone in particular?

There are some very skilled dog walkers that are flying under the radar, working part-time as vet technicians, groomers, and in animal shelters who might be an excellent fit for your dogs.

Go with someone that does this for a living (part or full time), rather than someone who is a student, retiree or someone just looking to fill in time. It's a huge commitment to show up at someone's home every single day for months and years. You want a professional - someone who is internally motivated to hold themselves accountable to the job they've committed to doing, no matter how cold it is outside.

So, start with this as a thought:

What kind of relationship do you want, and what kind of service fits around your busy schedule?

To generalise in a really broad way:

Solo dog walkers are like shopping at a small, locally owned store: highly personal relationships, flexible service, but with individual quirks and varying availability.

Dog walking companies are more like shopping at a large store: increased convenience, more accountability, but with more rules and process.

Overall, they're both fine. You just have to pick which works best for you. And remember there is little to no oversight in dog walking. The bosses rarely see their employees in action. So ultimately, the person who is walking your dog - whether or not they are self-employed or working for a service - is alone with your dogs almost all of the time.

We're not trying to scare you - dog walking really is a strange job. Other than folks at the dog park, or that old Australian lady that's always peeking out her window trying to catch our dogs peeing near her fence so she can chase us away with a broom, no one is watching us walk your dogs. So you have to do your homework during the hiring process.

Let's say you've found a few people or companies that look pretty good. Here are some tips for meeting with a potential dog walker:

1. There should be a free consultation at your home, with no obligation to hire the dog walker

This is the meet and greet. With larger companies, sometimes only the boss comes to meet you. Ask that whoever will actually be walking your dog - the primary walker - comes with them as well.

Pawsome does this before we take any dogs out on their first service, and we call this a Fuzzy Huddle. You will be meeting the primary caregiver intended for your dog, so everyone can relax and get comfortable about our services and their walker.

2. Watch them interact with your dogs during this initial meeting

Unless your dog is fearful, they should pretty much love the dog walker right away. Dog walkers stink of other dogs and have fur sprinkles raining from every piece of clothing. Dogs should react accordingly. And the dog walker? You should see pure joy on their faces. Meeting new dogs is FUN for us.

2a. If your dog is fearful with new people, watch how the walker handles this

Are they forcing themselves on your dog, insisting that they interact? Or are they hanging back, sitting on the floor, and calmly talking to you while your dog launches a tactile exploration of their jacket?

If your dog is painfully shy or has other serious quirks, it's ok to ask for a second meeting. You'll probably have to pay for it this time, but it will be helpful to have the dog walker meet your dog with you there again. Then, if you see that a little progress has been made, or you trust that the dog walker is a good one, go for it. Sometimes shy dogs are less shy when you're not home.

Which leads us neatly into...

2b. Remember that dogs are different when mum or dad aren't around

We have a client with two big, loud-as-heck dogs that go bonkers when someone comes to the door. She assumed that when we came to walk them that they would make an insane racket: enough to scare off a dozen intruders. Turns out, both her dogs were completely mute when our Head Carer walked in the door (so much for her personal security system).

This kind of thing happens a lot. Your dogs may be bolder or shyer in your presence. Friendly dogs might charge the door, growling and barking, when they are alone in the house and a stranger walks in. Shy dogs might be emboldened to go for a walk with the fur-sprinkled stranger, now that mum or dad aren't looking. At some point, if you like the dog walker, you just have to let them show up alone and see what happens.

3. If your dog has medical or behavioural issues, be honest about them

You want to know if the dog walker has the skills to work with your dog and they need to be able to make an informed decision. A good dog walker knows their limits. It's ok for them to tell you they aren't skilled enough to work with your aggressive dog. In fact, it's the responsible thing to do. So don't hide anything from them.

Don't try to sugarcoat your dog's issues so they'll want to work for you. It's not fair and it's not safe. If you hire them, they will have to walk into your home - alone - and it can be dangerous if you fail to mention that your 45kg dog will be loose in the house and has been known to pin strangers to the wall! Now is the time to be honest. Come up with a plan for future visits, so that the dog walker can enter your home safely with minimal stress for them and your dog. If your dog is fearful, you can plan to leave their harness on, so that the dog walker doesn't have to touch them too much on the first visit. Or if your dog is a nutter with strangers, you can plan to separate or gate them away from the door. This is a good time to start talking about this stuff.

Also the more you share, the more you can get a feel for their experience and skill level. Let's say you tell them your dog is reactive. A dog walker that's any good will have many follow up questions for you, so they can better understand what your dog's triggers are, what walking routes are safest, what your training plans are, etc. If they say, "Oh, I know how to walk reactive dogs," but they don't care to hear about your individual reactive dog's needs or have any questions, move on - quickly!



4. Find out how you'll know that they were there

Pawsome walkers use WhatsApp for communicating what's been happening with your dog: it's a secure way to give parents one-on-one connection with their dogs' carer, as well as a place to ask questions or let the carer know about anything in particular: not to mention the multiple number of pictures you will be receiving after each service! The Pawsome team loves getting to know each personality, and will ensure you're communicated with so you know exactly what everyone's been up to.

If any walker doesn't leave notes, ask them how you'll know they've been there each day. You need peace of mind knowing they've been and can prove they're doing their jobs. Don't be obnoxious about it, but it's totally fine to ask for some sort of proof your dog walker showed up.

5. They should have their professional goods on hand to show you

Dog walkers should have liability insurance, references, a detailed service contract, and clear, written policies and rates. No matter who they work for or if they're self-employed, all dog walkers should have this stuff. Before you hire them, you'll want to know: what's their cancellation policy? What are your daily and weekly rates and what forms of payment do you accept? What window of time will you be coming each day? Who pays the vet bills if my dog gets hurt at the dog park? This kind of stuff should be in writing. Pawsome collects your details via a comprehensive online form prior to your Fuzzy Huddle: not only for records but for full insurance reasons as well. Future services with us are booked via a simple-to-use online portal.

Then at some point you'll have to just cross your heart, lock up the Mustang, and give them the keys to your house. It's scary to trust a stranger with your dog and your home, and this is why each Pawsome staff member is fully police checked by NSW (it's a prerequisite for joining our team). We're always amazed at how many people have given us the keys to their houses within 30 minutes of a Fuzzy Huddle over the years.

Quite frankly, **it's an honour for us to be trusted that way**. Experienced dog walkers understand this and do everything they can to make you feel comfortable and confident in them and their abilities.



*At the end of the day, always go with
your gut and choose the walker your
dogs and you really get those feels from.*

We hope you got some great info. It's the leashed we could do.

Pawsome Pet Services is a team of experienced, passionate animal lovers looking after paws all over Inner West and Eastern Suburbs Sydney, and we've been doing so since 2015. We truly love what we do, and if there's any info from this guide that resonates with you we'd love to chat to see how we can help your pack.

Please feel free to reach out via one of the channels below, and let's see if we can create a barking good time together.



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