

How to interview a pet caregiver

By Steve Penhollow—Care.com contributing writer

Conducting your pet care interview is an important part of finding the right caregiver. Whether you start with a phone interview or an in-person meeting, the topics below will help you create an effective interviewing strategy that helps you get to know your pet caregiver candidate.

Training

All sorts of pet lovers are good at taking care of pets. Make sure your sitter is trained appropriately for your needs. If you need a dog walker, then someone experienced at doing so would be great. If you have sick pet that needs special care, then someone with the appropriate training would be best. Make sure you ask the caregiver about their specific job experience. A person who loves animals but has no experience caring for one may not be the right match for you.

Emergency plans

Do you have a back-up pet sitter and a veterinarian on call? Create a list of emergency contacts for your sitter. Ask your sitter if she has ever handled a pet care emergency. Discuss what to do in case she has an emergency with your pet.

Rates and services

Make a clear list of what you want your pet sitter to do and discuss each point. Do you want your pet to be groomed while you are gone? Do you think it's important that he spend at least an hour a day catching Frisbees with your dog? A pet-sitter can do all these things. But you need to find out if your pet sitter will do them and what they typically charge for each service.

References

Get three references and call them. Checking references is vital to getting quality care, so make sure you go through with it. Ask what services the sitter provided them, when and why she ended her employment with them, and what their level of satisfaction was with the sitter's service.

Have your pet meet the sitter

Does your pet even like your pet sitter? All the training in the world would not forestall a bad match here. You don't want to set your pet up on a blind date. Be sure to schedule a get-to-know-you meeting at your home or in a local park. Pets and their caregivers need to have good chemistry!

Is your sitter bonded and insured?

This covers many dire contingencies (accidents, negligence, theft of your property, and more). If not, you need to have a frank discussion about your sitter's roles and responsibilities. Check your homeowner's insurance to see what situations would be covered in case your sitter or your pet damages something in your home.

How many other pets is your pet-sitter currently sitting for?

A full dance card, so to speak, means less special attention for your pet. Make sure your pet sitter has time for your pet.

Is your pet sitter asking you as many questions as you are asking her?

If the pet sitter doesn't seem especially curious about your pet, that is a red flag. Pet caregivers should not

How to interview a pet caregiver (continued)

only show interest in your pet and the job you're offering, but should also ask questions to clarify roles and responsibilities. Give them the opportunity to give you background information about what motivates them to provide great pet care.

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