



Daycare Operations Standards By The Dog Gurus

The standards listed are considered the minimum acceptable aspects to prioritizing safety during dog daycare and off-leash playgroup sessions.

Design and Layout of Physical Space should allow:

- Ability to separate large and small dogs, puppies and tiny dogs (under 10lbs)
- Double gates or doors into play areas to minimize risk of escape and provide safer entry or exit of dogs to and from the playgroup
- 70 - 100 Square foot per dog of play area (could be as low as 50 for groups of small dogs only or 40 for toy breeds)
- Nap areas where dogs can be individually rested away from the dogs
- Areas where dogs can get away for a brief break on the play floor (e.g., under equipment, in a crate, etc.)
- Safe, rust resistant, easy-to-clean construction materials for play area dividers that allows for noise and odor control as well as good sanitation
- Non-skid flooring that allows for good sanitation
- Climate control measures both inside and outside

Evaluating Dogs prior to acceptance for play includes:

- Formal acceptance policy in place with defined behaviors required from dogs that participate
- Dogs evaluated individually for appropriateness to group play (e.g., means body language provides evidence participation is enjoyed and not just tolerated)

Operating Procedures focused on dog health and safety means:

- Dogs play naked (e.g., no collars or surgical scissors are available in every play area)
- Fresh water in clean containers available in all play areas at all times
- Minimum rest time of at least 2 hours a day
- 100% supervision of dogs in playgroups by staff educated on group dog management (i.e., leaders are physically present with dogs)
- Ratio of 1 person to no more than 10-15 dogs
- Positive, benevolent leadership tools used to manage dogs

Educating Staff includes:

- First aid training for canines
- Canine Body Language Training (i.e., basics plus emotional states, stress signals, warning signals and aggressive displays)
- Use of positive reinforcement methods only to manage dogs
- Recognition of dogs who aren't suitable for daycare
- Group play education – (i.e., how to effectively manage dogs using positive reinforcement methods: obedience cues, splitting or redirecting, time outs)
- Training in defensive handling
- Training in dog bite prevention
- OSHA requirements
- Customer Service Training
- Formal process for new hires to progress through training
- Continuing education requirements for all staff
- Training in predatory aggression

The following are red flags that safety needs to be improved if:

- There are more than two bites or fights per year requiring medical care to dogs or staff
- Dogs are allowed to continue in playgroups after inflicting a level 3 bite or higher (see bite level chart in [Off-Leash Dog Play: A Complete Guide to Safety & Fun](#))
- Playgroups have repeated periods of high arousal levels lasting more than 5 minutes.
- Any dogs exhibit behavior indicating they want to leave the playgroup such as repeatedly jumping on exit gate/door or up on staff attendants

For a comprehensive list of off-leash play best practices join The Dog Gurus and download our eBook: [Four E's of Excellence in Off-Leash Dog Play](#).

www.TheDogGurus.com

The Dog Gurus, Robin Bennett and Susan Briggs are authors, consultants and experts on dogs! They have been “reading dogs,” teaching families how to train dogs, and working in the pet care industry helping others keep dogs safe for over 25 years.

Co-authors of [Off-Leash Dog Play: A Complete Guide to Safety and Fun](#), and an extensive staff-training program called, [Knowing Dogs](#), they are on a mission to keep dogs safe during off-leash dog play.