

# Is your dog being walked?

or taken for a ride

**E**ven though we have two high energy Dalmatians, we've never used a dog walking service or one that combines house minding with walking if we're away. We've been lucky that close friends who are also dog people have taken over our house while we were overseas or we got great kennel attention for them.

While Lisa walks every morning in the St Stephens Church walled-in grounds and cemetery next to our house in Newtown, I've taken the dogs to Centennial Park for long sessions of Fetch or even running alongside me on the bike through permitted areas. Both of us have noticed dog-walking services in the past ranging from great to questionable.

**Now available**

## Urine-Off™ TWO LITRE REFILLS



**NEW**

2 litre with electric sprayer

2 litre refill

Urine-Off™ & Black Light Clean™

## HOUSETRAINING JUST GOT EASIER

Trust Urine-Off™



**Finally... Something that actually works!**

visit our website:

**[www.urine-off.com.au](http://www.urine-off.com.au)**

to find a retailer, or shop online

*"While the law says that no more than four dogs can be walked by one handler, sometimes this is not the case. So this is where pet owners need to vet the service before handing over the fur child."*

In my dashes around Centennial Park, it takes 11 minutes for each four kilometre circuit of the Grand Parade and about 30 minutes to quickstep around the side-walk. As I round the Dog Bowl area next to the Federation Pavilion, I often see the first canine couriers bringing in their loads of hounds collected from their clients' homes early morning. While some are walked on leads, others are set loose to romp as the walkers make their rounds of the field, bags at the ready to scoop poo for the hour-long session.

But over the course of a couple of weeks, one dog walking service attendant I noticed didn't really walk. While it takes me 45 minutes to do four rounds, I noticed on a couple of occasions that the walker arrived close to a bench each time, poured out the pups from the van and then sat down to read the paper and embrace a cup of coffee with headphones on, bopping to the beat and not listening out for problems. Next round they were still there, the dogs sort of hanging out but not getting exercised. And by the next round, they were gone, which meant the animals were only out of the car for 20 minutes, max. And they didn't really get walked, they got dumped while their owners were taken for a ride.

Most dog walking operators pride themselves on their care and service. They know it's obvious to owners if their dogs haven't been properly walked because they come home to nervy animals and possibly even pets that are not in condition and gaining weight. You can often tell the best ones because they're not only fit, they're as eager as their charges to charge out to wherever they're walking that morning. And they come back happy too, if you see them.

Trusting a dog walker to properly take care of your fur child is similar to trusting a babysitter or day care centre. You need to vet the service or person you employ and feel confident in turning over your pet and home security to them.

Dog walking is not an easy gig. There is the expense of equipment from the vehicle and its cages, harnesses or restraint areas and matting to the leads, towels, poo bags, treats and other ongoing consumables. A dog walking operator may also have to hire staff to take on more clients to pay the bills. People may want their dogs walked at particular times creating high load periods and low demand slots. There's insurance which may be both liability and Workcover. And there's the endless paperwork, billing, collecting and occasionally chasing bad debts.

Plus, there can be accidents or injuries sustained if there's an accidental fight while being walked and the operator can be put in the bad position of having to pay for either or both depending on which is the aggressor and which is the aggrieved. It's rare but it happens.

Add to that keeping everything clean and also having to clean up dogs who have taken that accidental swim or rolled in another's poo and sometimes it's not a pretty job. It can be unforgiving if you've got a cold, sprain or injury yourself or had a tired and emotional evening. It's also wearing if you have to walk in the rain, cold or excessive heat.

Those who have embraced it for an occupation, career or part-time earner quickly know if they are cut out for the demands. Like many business sectors in the pet industry, there are no qualification, certification or business requirements to be a dog walker. While the law says that no more than four dogs can be walked by one handler, sometimes this is not the case. So this is where pet owners need to vet the service before handing over the fur child.

Though there is an organisation in Sydney—Dog Walkers and Professional Pet Minders Association (D.A.P.P.A) with a website at [www.dappainc.org.au](http://www.dappainc.org.au) and about 25 members-- with a Code of Conduct as many informal associations like it in various cities do, but it's not a peak body. There are other membership groups that either market their members or promote themselves, there is no association with the Pet Industry Association of Australia nor does the PIAA concern itself with this industry sector.

Finding a dog walker to suit your particular needs can be hit and miss whether you are a busy executive, frantic mom, elderly person or suffering an injury that prevents you walking fido yourself or just need casual walking service. We talked to a number of dog walking service operators, interviewing them directly for this article or calling them anonymously to find out their basic costs and policies. My assistant called ten services in no order and the results were not surprising.

Two operations had different names and numbers but were the same owner. One of the landlines rang out with no voicemail and the mobile went straight to personal voicemail. The other brand went straight to the first company's personal voicemail.

Two others rang a few times and went to business voicemails, one was a 1300 number which also referred to its website for further information and the other a mobile.

Two rang out totally with no voicemail after 20 rings.

One person answered and said he had sold the business to a former client of his and gave another mobile which went to voicemail. One was advertised on an Internet site but the phone number was not correct, it had been taken over by a tradesman.

Two others were answered by the business owners who were both informative and friendly. One suggested going to their Internet site for information to begin with and it was packed with detail and full of photos of happy client dogs.

They both charged \$20 per walk, one charged \$17 for a second dog while the other charged \$14 for an extra dog and gave an additional 10% off for four or more walks per week. The former primarily walks the dogs in Centennial Park while the latter uses a variety of destinations both parks and safe streets. Both billed monthly and payment is by EFT. Both happily provided insurance details

The first operator only did group walks and dogs were on probation for a month. The second service offered individual walks and, if properly socialised, the dog can come out on group walks which are at 11 am, 1 and 3 pm. They insist on meeting with you and the dog first where they bring along insurance advice and police certificates to confirm they have no criminal history.

Unlike many other professions that require qualifications, training or certification to operate businesses under licenses, inspection and regulation, dog walkers do not have to comply with much more than the rule on walking only four animals at once, picking up excrement and keeping the animals in control. They do not have to be structured as a business nor are they required to be insured.

So how do you choose the right person or business to walk your pet? We talked to a few long term operators and got tips from them. First we checked in with Mike Steinberg who runs Home Alone pet Care—also a long term advertiser with us—which not only takes care of pets in their own homes while owners are away but also takes pets for walks while owners are at work or are unable to exercise them.



home alone  
pet care

Dog Walking  
Pet Sitting  
Feeding

- 7 Days a Week - 365 Days
- Fully Insured
- Since 1992



1300 306 756  
[www.homealone.com.au](http://www.homealone.com.au)

## DOG LOVERS WANTED

Enjoy the companionship of your favourite breeds while their owners are away.

Stays can be as short as overnight,  
or as long as a few weeks.  
You tell us what you prefer!

Secure yard required.

Everything for the dog is provided and you  
are even paid a daily allowance.




Caring Family Homes  
for your Dog's Holiday

Contact  
"Don't Fret Pet!"  
today on  
**1300 30 70 21**  
or visit us as  
[www.dontfretpet.com.au](http://www.dontfretpet.com.au)

*"The questions you need to ask are not simply price but what the session entails—how much time is spent walking, is it on lead or off, where are they being exercised and is it in a group or individual setting according to your preference."*

**PORTERS 4 PETS  
Pet Taxi Service**

We transport your pets to  
Boarding Kennels/Cattery, The Vet,  
The Airport & Quarantine Pick-ups.  
SERVICING  
Sydney (City, East & North)



Call Janet  
**0417 374 848**  
porters4pets@tpg.com.au  
www.porters4pets.com.au

www.wintergraphics.com.au 05.07

As he points out, references are important but you should check if there are referees for your prospective service that have dogs of the same or similar breed to yours. Check if they have a website which indicates they have been established a while and are likely more professional than operations based on only a mobile phone.

You can also check with local vets and get an idea from them as who they might recommend as legitimate and trustworthy or to see if your vet knows the one you are considering. Though incidents are rare that require vet treatment, everyone we spoke to has had it happen at least once and therefore the local vet is likely to know their local walkers.

The questions you need to ask are not simply price but what the session entails—how much time is spent walking, is it on lead or off, where are they being exercised and is it in a group or individual setting according to your preference. And it's important to know how many dogs are being walked at one time, how are they transported and restrained.

It's not rude to ask for proof of insurance rather than just a verbal assurance.

It's also important to know if they take intact males or females in season as most operators won't due to risk of fights or problems. Also important is how the walks are invoiced and paid as most invoice by EFT but may be weekly, fortnightly or monthly depending on the clientele.

Speaking to another long time operator, her tip was to initially meet the prospective walker where they work rather than them coming to your home. This way they can see how you handle your dog, how your dog responds and also how your dog might relate to them and their other dogs they're walking. You can also see their vehicle, where and how they exercise their dogs and how they relate to their charges.

But Mike also points to the need for owners to be responsible for certain aspects of the relationship. As he notes, certain breeds are easy to walk and easily socialise and interact with others while some are naturally high strung and can cause problems with fear aggression. He recommends that owners send their dogs to puppy school or have training to be properly socialised.

Owners need to have their dogs properly identified and registered with tags on collars and microchipping that is up to date if the owner has moved or details have changed. If there is a special harness, collar or lead that the dog is used to or comfortable with, it needs to be supplied if appropriate.

The owner needs to understand the dog's needs as well as their own. What's the best time for walking? Do the owners leave for work early, return early or late and when do they need the dog walked and how. You need to determine if they're a one person operation or have staff and can they accommodate your specific time and care needs. How do they recruit their staff, who are they and what continuity is there as well as to who will actually be walking your dog once the introduction is over and the walks commence.

And because your walker will have access to your house, you have to feel confident that they can handle your security requirements and know how to pick up and drop off the dog. And if they have a marked vehicle identifying them as a dog walker or pet minder, it's a good idea to ask them to park down the street instead of directly at your premises. This way someone with criminal intent would know no one is home and to wait until after the dog is removed before breaking in.

Robyn Smith, who was a founder of D.A.P.P.A in 1998 and has been a 20 year veteran of dog walking as The Pet Nanny, says she's seen many operators come and go over the years and often encounters them in parks where she works her packs.

She's seen great operators and shonks alike ranging from dogs being collected in an open ute, walkers who seem to be plane watching instead of poo scooping or who are equally distracted by their mobiles. But as she points out, most dog walkers are caring and provide a great service which goes beyond just pooch wrangling.

"We see the health of the dog in action so may be aware of injuries, variations in coat conditions and especially the results of what the dog is being fed when we pick up their poo. You might need to alert the owner to a weepy eye, sore, rash or other problem like where the dog has had cooked bones and has had a painful time passing the splintered pieces." Robyn notes. "As much as you'd like to tell owners what to feed their dogs, it's nice to give advice but you have to be careful how you say it in case they take it the wrong way. Dog walking is as much about socialising the dogs as it is exercising them."

Mike agrees as he sees the results of boredom or inactivity in the 40-50 dogs his team walks every day. "Part of what we do is keep dogs happy and healthy, helping to avoid the inactivity, boredom and overfeeding that dogs can be prone to if they are at home on their own all day with very little to do and just food to keep them company."


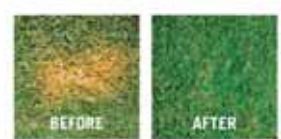
In the end, it's always a trust relationship. One person we spoke to was paranoid about getting a new dog walker after her long relied upon service moved to Melbourne. Suspecting that the new service wasn't doing the job and wanting to check on it, she first decided to use a dog pedometer to measure the amount of exercise she gave the pup in an hour and then let it be taken away. It came back with even more mileage than she had been able to clock up!

So deciding that she should perhaps observe her walker at work, she parked near where her dog was being exercised and discovered to her delight that not only was the walker totally focused on the pup but was also engaging it in repeated ball throws, wearing it out in the course of the full hour. Which surprised her because, despite her tries over the years, her dog never really was interested in retrieving.

# YOUR DOG CAN SAVE YOUR LAWN

**Dog Rocks® placed in your dog's water bowl can reduce burn patches caused by your loving pet taking a pee**

All natural minerals, no chemicals – straight from the earth

Available from Pet Shops and Veterinary Clinics

**Dog Rocks®**

[www.dogrocks.net](http://www.dogrocks.net)

Dog Rocks® are an all natural product of Australia

