

# Choosing a Cat-Sitter or Kennel

*Basic Feline Care*



## CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

Sometimes the most stressful part of going on vacation is not the choice of where to stay, but rather the choice of what to do with your pets. The dramatic increase in pet sitters and boarding kennels in recent years now makes this decision a little easier.

**Kennel or Pet Sitter?** Whether you use a pet sitting service or board your cat is up to you. You know best how your individual pet is likely to react to a stranger entering the house, or to being kept in a new location without you. Take some time to think about your absence from your pet's point of view.

Know your cat and how it will adapt to long hours alone. Some cats get bored and create mischief like knocking over plants or tearing out window screens.. If you are going to be gone for more than a week, your cat may be safer in a kennel, where it is not going to escape and get lost.

On the other hand, your cat may get very stressed in a kennel, which can weaken the immune system. Cats are more likely to catch colds and other illnesses when their immune systems are depressed. It is sometimes easier on them to stay in their home where they are comfortable and everything is familiar to them.

**Pet Sitters** Pet sitters come to your home once or twice a day to care for your animals. If you have more than one pet, a pet sitter is often much less expensive than paying individual boarding fees for each cat and dog. If you also have birds, fish, and other pets, it is more convenient to have them cared for in your home.

The neighbor child may charge less, but a professional pet sitter is usually a mature adult capable of taking responsibility for your home and animals. If you consider hiring a child or teenager, be sure their parents are aware and involved also.

Pet sitters keep an eye on your house while you are gone. They usually offer additional services at no charge, such as bringing in mail, turning on lights, taking out trash, and picking up the paper. This activity makes your house appear occupied, and lowers the risk of a break-in.

A professional pet sitter should be licensed, bonded and insured. This means they have a business license, a security bond or insurance policy to cover accidents (like broken vases), and a liability policy.

If your pet sitter is a total stranger, it may be a bit unnerving to give them access to your home. Ask for references and meet the sitter. Consider trying him or her for just a one or two-visit job first, to see if you, and your pet, are comfortable. You can also lock up valuables or lock doors to certain rooms.

**Evaluating the Pet Sitter** How long have you been in this business?  
Are you licensed, bonded, and insured? With what companies?  
Can you provide references from other cat owners? Call these people and see what they say.  
Do you ever hire others to cover your appointments? Ask to meet anyone who will be coming into your home.  
Do you have varied experience with cats (more than just your own)? Do you have your own cats? Watch how they interact with your cat. If your cat is extremely shy, how do they plan to deal with that?  
How long will the sitter stay for each visit? Do you play or sit with the cat?  
What experience do you have with emergencies? How have you handled mishaps? What your plan of action? What will you do if the cat gets out or disappears?

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**The Contract** You should be asked to sign a contract and a form giving the sitter permission to seek medical care for your cat if necessary. Be certain to provide the name and phone number of your preferred vet. Include a listing of any medications your pet may be on, and how and when to give them. It is not a good idea to allow your cat to go outside without direct supervision at anytime, but can be especially dangerous when using a cat-sitter. Cats can become lost outside as the pet-sitter is not a familiar person to the cat. If your cats are allowed outside, be sure to give your pet sitter specific instructions about when the cat can be let out. If they are indoor-only cats, it helps to leave a note taped to all doors. If your cat likes to dash out, warn the pet sitter.

**Boarding Your Cat** All kennels should require current vaccine information, both for your pet's safety and that of the other cats. Rabies, leukemia, and distemper are the critical ones. There is also a new vaccine to help prevent upper respiratory infections, similar to the bordetella vaccine for dogs. Because there are many types of "colds," the vaccine may not prevent illness completely, but your cat is more protected than with nothing at all. This is a relatively new vaccine, and many kennels do not require it at this time.

Conditions vary at different boarding kennels. Visit the kennel and ask to see the cat area.

**Evaluating the Kennel** Is the cat area near the dogs? Cats may stress at the barking and movement from the dog area. Is it clean? Look in the occupied cages. Are the litter boxes clean? Is there a heavy smell of cat urine? Are the floors and accessories clean and dirt-free or is there hair everywhere? How big are the cages? Is there enough room for the cat to get away from the litter box? Some kennels offer large cages with a shelf for the cat to perch on. Others may offer daily playtime for an extra charge. Do the cats there look contented and healthy, or stressed? Is there privacy between cages? Some cats will stress if they don't have an area they can get into where they are hidden from other cats. Can you bring a bed or something with a familiar scent on it like a t-shirt? Are the kennel hours convenient? You may be stuck paying for an extra night if the kennel is closed on Sunday, for example. Are you charged for a full day if you pick up your cat in the morning? Does the kennel offer special services, such as baths or other grooming? Can they medicate your cat if needed? If your cat needs daily medication or shots, consider boarding at your vet's office. Boarding facilities may charge extra or not be equipped to handle medical care. Can the kennel feed your cat the same food he gets at home? Will they prepare special meals? Give treats if you provide them? It's generally best to keep your cat on her regular diet, even if that requires providing the food and paying extra for the feeding service. Are any special arrangements available for long-term stays? Are there extra charges for these services? What form of payment do they accept? Is any of it expected up front?

**Before You Leave** Be sure to leave emergency phone numbers with whoever is taking care of your cat. Call occasionally to see how your cat is doing. You'll rest easier knowing that your cat is in good hands while you're gone.