



Louise Newman– Tips for Choosing a Dog Kennel podcast

Cathy: I'm Cathy Beer and today's podcast topic is how to choose the best boarding kennel for your dog. It's only weeks away until the long summer holiday period starts and time is running out for you to book a boarding kennel. On the line with me now is Louise Newman, the founder of Let's Go Fido, a dog training business in Sydney. Lou knows all about dogs. She is a qualified professional trainer with a Certificate IV in Companion Animal Services as a Delta-accredited instructor. She's also a Pet Dog Ambassador Instructor and Assessor and has many years of experience in training pet dogs large and small. Welcome, Lou, to the Pets4Life podcast.

Louise: Welcome, Cathy. How are you today?

Cathy: I'm very well, and yourself?

Louise: Good. I'm all good now. You wanted to ask me some lovely questions about kennels, I believe.

Cathy: Yes. So what would be your first step to choosing a boarding kennel?

Louise: I think the big one would be, for me—I generally say if the puppies are over six months I might send them to a kennel. Or, younger than ten [years], I might send them to a kennel. Either end, I sort of feel sometimes their needs might be better suited to having somebody come to the home. My first time when I choose a kennel is—I go and visit it. I really would encourage everybody to go and visit the kennel.

Cathy: Right.

Louise: Yep. And sometimes they're far away, and so what I generally suggest when I'm looking for a kennel and it's a reasonable distance away and I can't get down there, I will phone them and ask if I can FaceTime them and they can take me on a quick tour. And that has worked well for me. And the question you asked—what am I looking for? Why am I going and what am I trying to see when I'm on FaceTime? I'm listening, very often. I do expect there to be some noise and I do expect dogs to get excited when handlers are going in—to see the dogs and take them out for exercise. But I'm not expecting, you know, a chorus of huge noise—of barking constantly wherever we go. I'm not expecting to hear barking. That's probably the first thing that I'm looking for because I think that

would be really quite stressful to be in that environment for a week or two weeks or three weeks, depending on how big the owners' trips were.

Cathy: What else would be on your checklist that you'd be looking for, for a good boarding kennel?

Louise: Once I've looked at noise, the next thing I'd have a look at is what they offer. So one of the things I've been looking for is that my dog can have some one-on-one time. Most of our dogs are just used to our family lives, and they're used to going to the park and hanging out with individuals and unfamiliar dogs and unfamiliar people, but they're also used to one-on-one time. So I've been looking to see how much they get of that, or can I organise that for my dog as well as a playtime.

Cathy: Right.

Louise: I've been looking to see how many members of staff are in the playtime. So, normally playtime is a yard or fenced-in area where they have a group of dogs together. And the rule that in my local council area is one handler to four dogs. So I would be thinking that if you've got four dogs that don't know each other, I'd really like to be thinking that there was at least one handler for four dogs. And if there are more than four dogs, then definitely two handlers, because having a group of dogs that haven't met each other before and they're just in quite an artificial environment—some are going to be a little bit worked up. And if something were to go off, you're going to need two people to separate the dogs. So, absolutely two members of staff once you get past four dogs. You know, two members of staff in the yard at all times would be great. And I think some kennels will say small dogs, large dogs... I don't know how I feel about that. I sort of feel that most dogs can mix across different age groups.

Cathy: And sizes.

Louise: And sizes. So, I'm not sure. I think I would talk to the kennels about that, and it depends on the time of year. Christmastime is very busy. And then they might go, *Look, we're going to put these young and enthusiastic dogs together irrespective of size.* Or, *No, we're going to put young, enthusiastic dogs up to ten kilos into one yard and over ten kilos in another yard.* So, I'd definitely again ask those questions about what my dog can get—what options there are for my dog socially. One-on-one time, group time, how that's organised, how many members of staff is really important. And another question I might ask is about what they get given when they're back in their runs. So, if my dog goes back into their run, is it interesting for them. I mean, I'm pretty excited when I come back from the gym or I've been out with friends, and it seems quite nice to have that transition. It'd be really great if they had enrichment toys for them to roll around and find food. You know, keep that level of naturally good hormones running in your dogs that they're enjoying, rather than, *I'm in my run and I miss my buddies that I just*

played with and I miss people. It'd be really nice to have that transition that they go in with enrichment toys. And again, ask that. Most good kennels will offer that as a standard. Some will ask you to pay extra, and that's fine. Just knowing that your dog can have that is very important.

Cathy: And what about food? What about ensuring good, quality food, or can we assume that they'll do that?

Louise: Most of the kennels will do dry food and there will be an option where, if someone has a senior package, that senior package can have different foods. Some of them will have an option where you can supply the food if you know your dog is a fussy eater. They'll supply the food. And obviously if you've got dietary requirements—you've got allergies to food or you've got medical issues with your food content—then absolutely they'll allow you to bring that. But often you have to pay a small fee just for the fact that that member of staff has to go and do something different. But normally that's very much catered for. But for ease—I think for health and their feeding, someone who's feeding forty to a hundred dogs—normally it's dry kibble. Again, ask about that.

Cathy: Okay, and are there any sorts of warning signs to avoid at a boarding kennel? Anything that dog owners should watch out for?

Louise: There are a couple of things that I watch out for. Noise is the really big one.

Cathy: Yeah.

Louise: When I went to choose kennels for our dogs, I went up to visit and I was really looking at the noise level because I think that would be very stressful. B, a lot of the new-purpose built kennels have the runs facing out. So, their yards are in the middle and the runs are facing out. So the dogs can't see looking out into a beautiful space. And that's really important. So, noise is the first one. The second one is options. You're looking at the fact that, if your dog is not particularly great around other dogs, and they're going to go to the kennel, and they're going to have one-on-one time, you're looking for the kennel to offer that they will screen the runs, so that your dog can be in his run and know that the dog's next to him, but not have to look at them all the time. And most kennels will offer that. The other one is—it's really important to me—that you look at a kennel that doesn't do...they call it "double stacking" in the business, where your dog is guaranteed to have their run to themselves. And that's really important to me that your dog has that area of peace and quiet, because in your home they're used to having a lot of downtime. And they know their routine; they're very confident with your routine. So, just because the kennels are busy and it's that peak time doesn't mean that they should put another dog in your run for them to make profit. Your dog should be allowed to have that run to themselves because you paid for it.

Cathy: And by “run,” you mean the kennel? Is that what you mean?

Louise: The kennel. So when I say the “run,” very often the kennels have an area where the dogs are at night, which normally has two doors: the door to the outside, where the kennel handler will come in, and a door to the grassy area, which is their run. So at night-time, they’re all enclosed and safe, and that generally keeps them cool in the summer and warm in the winter. And then in the daytime, they will come out of that little house, and they’ll go into their run so that they can clean the house.

Cathy: Right.

Louise: And then they’ll have free range of both areas to do as they like. And then they’ll have options to go out on walks or options to go see and play with other dogs.

Cathy: Right.

Louise: So that’s what I mean by that.

Cathy: Okay.

Louise: One of the questions you asked me for things to look for: I’m not a big fan of kennels that offer training. And that sounds silly—it seems like that’s an ideal situation that you’re on holiday and somebody else can train your dog. And the reason I say that is—well, the reason I personally say that—is that effective training should be done between the owner and the dog. If somebody else is training your dog, *they’re* going to have a great relationship with your dog. And then you need to have two or three sessions after to transition that. So if that’s not offered, that would be a heads-up to me that it’s not going to be in the best interest for you and your dog. The other one is, whoever is offering that training, you need to make sure that they are a positive reinforcement trainer. Your dog is already in that state of stress. When having somebody who’s using a harsher message than I would advocate when your dog is already feeling stressed—I don’t think would be beneficial to your dog’s stability. If the person offering the training is not a Delta-accredited, a Cert. IV, or doesn’t have affiliations to institutions that are held accountable for not using force on the dogs, then I wouldn’t be going with that training organisation. However good that kennel is, I’d go to that kennel, but I would not take that training.

Cathy: Right. Yeah, good point.

Louise: Okay. I was going to say some of the kennels now offer water parks, and I would really look at that as an option because a lot of the kennels are—in Australia—are out of town, and in the summer coming, it’s extremely hot. So please do look at the options for your dog to get wet and cool.

Cathy: Yeah.

Louise: So some will have dam swims; some will have walking down a stream; some will have a water park per se; some will have paddling pools in the yard. But do ask them about hot days. And if you've got a dog that isn't very good with storms, because we're going into that summer season now where we do have a lot of storms, ask me again what the protocol is in a storm. I think that would be really important, too.

Cathy: Thanks, Lou, for taking time out of your busy schedule to share those great tips.

Louise: Absolute pleasure, Cathy.

Cathy: I'm sure pet owners will have peace of mind knowing their pooch will be happy and well looked-after in a good kennel while they're on holidays. I hope you can join the Pets4Life podcast again soon.

Louise: I would love to. Thanks, Cathy.

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