

Does Leaving Your Pet When You Travel Give You the Jitters?

Reassure your sense of calm and your pet's, by methodically checking off these five points whenever you must be away. Plus, bonus ways to make your pet feel like you're present even while you're gone. Don't travel without doing this.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Pet sitters run the gamut from professionals who offer pet-sitting services as their primary business to hobbyists, who simply pick up a job here and there when they can
- It's important to do your research before trusting a stranger to come into your home and care for your pet
- Pet sitters with good reputations are often booked up well in advance, so start your search early
- One of the best starting points to finding a pet sitter is to get a referral from someone you trust, including friends, family or your veterinarian
- Meet with potential pet sitters in your home to see how he or she interacts with your pets

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published March 23, 2017.

If you're planning to be on vacation or out of town on business, figuring out who will care for your pets in your absence is one of the most important tasks at hand. There are pet parents who have not left their home in years because they couldn't find a person or facility to trust — but it can be done.

The first step is deciding what type of pet care you're after. There are **boarding facilities**, of course, but these are often stressful for pets.

Many pet owners instead leave their pets with family or friends, but this can lead to tension in your relationship if the person feels obligated to do so — or if your pet isn't the best-behaved dog or cat while you're away.

A happy medium is hiring a professional pet sitter — someone who you hire to come to your home to care for your pets. Your animals get to stay in the comfort of their own home, and you get peace of mind knowing they're healthy, happy and safe — assuming you choose a reputable and trustworthy sitter.

It's important to know that pet sitters run the gamut from professionals who offer pet-sitting services as their primary business to hobbyists, who simply pick up a job here and there when they can.

Both can be good options, but it's important to do your research before trusting a stranger to come into your home and care for your pet. Here's what to look for, broken down into five steps.¹

1. **Start searching as soon as possible** — Pet sitters with good reputations are often booked up well in advance, especially during holidays. According to a membership survey conducted by Pet Sitters International (PSI), an educational association for professional pet sitters:²

"... [M]ore than 60 percent of its members are completely booked for holiday pet-sitting visits two to three weeks prior to the holiday — and nearly 13 percent are usually fully booked at least two months in advance."

You don't want to be rushed into this decision, or forced to use a sitter you're not sure about just because she's the only one available. As soon as you begin planning your trip, start searching for a pet sitter (and, once you have once you trust, book her services as soon as you know the dates of your trip).

2. **Identify what type of care you're after** — Pet sitting can take on many forms, such as stopping by a set number of times in a day to feed and walk your pets.

There are also pet sitters who will stay overnight in your home or take your pet to stay in their home. Some pet sitters are willing to care for caged pets, such as birds or reptiles, while others will care for chickens.

There are even pet sitters who offer grooming and training sessions while you're away, or who will house sit for you at the same time (bringing in mail, opening shades, taking out the garbage and generally making your home look "lived in" while you're away).

It should be noted that while most people seek pet sitters when they'll be out of town, some also use pet sitters to take their dogs for daily walks, administer a pet medication while they're at work or in emergency situations when they can't make it home in time to feed or walk their pet.

3. **Ask people you trust who watches their pets** — One of the best starting points to finding a pet sitter is to get a referral from someone you trust, including friends, family or your veterinarian.

You can also check PSI or the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters (NAPPS) for recommendations. According to NAPPS, "[E]nsure that the potential sitter has bonding and liability insurance coverage."³

Commercial liability insurance is important in case of accidents while bonding protects against theft.

4. **Interview potential pet sitters** — You should absolutely meet and interview any pet sitters you're considering prior to hiring them. Ideally, NAPPS states, "Have the pet sitter meet you in your home and make sure he/she interacts well with your pet."

During your interview with your potential pet sitter, ask about past experience, what types of pets she's cared for and whether she's completed any special training. Ask what her procedure is in case of emergency, and what the plan is to take care of your pets if she becomes ill or cannot make it to your home.

Be sure to also discuss communication; will your pet sitter text you written updates or photos daily?

You'll also want to ask for references of past clients and be sure she's experienced in caring for your type of pet (species, age, special needs, behavior issues and any other unique circumstances that may require special care).

Also, if you're delayed can the sitter care for your pet until you're able to get home?

5. **Help your pet sitter succeed** — You also play a role in how well your pet is cared for while you're away, in the form of educating your pet sitter about your pet's needs and routine.

Provide clear and detailed instructions regarding feeding, medications, emergency contact information (including your veterinarian's contact information and the closest 24-hour emergency vet) and other important information.

You can also leave out a schedule of your dog's routine (times of meals, playtime, walking and bedtime).

Pet supplies should be left in one easy-to-access location and purchase more than enough to last for the duration of your trip (in addition to food and treats, other supplies you should leave handy include extra litter if your pet is a cat, brushes, toys, a leash and a carrier. You may also want to leave cleaning supplies handy in case of accidents.

Be sure to also show your pet sitter how to use your home's security system, circuit breaker and any other important features.

Additional Tips for a Successful Trip

Even with a trustworthy pet sitter, leaving your pet can be difficult — for him and for you. You can help to make your cat or dog feel more at home while you're away by:

- Asking your pet sitter to turn on lights in the evening and turn on the TV or radio occasionally
- Leaving a worn t-shirt near your pet's bed to remind him of you
- Properly pet-proofing your home; remember that bored and lonely pets may get into more trouble than usual, so put anything dangerous (electrical cords, breakables, food, medications and more) safely out of your pet's reach

Sources and References

¹ [VetStreet, November 16, 2016](#)

² [Pet Sitters International, Book pet care early to ensure happy holidays for your pets](#)

³ [National Association of Professional Pet Sitters, Hiring a Pet Sitter \(Archived\)](#)
