

# ABC'S OF DOG DAYCARE

BY LIZ COPP

THANKS TO HEMINGWAY'S HAPPY HOUNDS, MIA THE MALAMUTE'S FAMILY, AND KATY FLANAGAN FOR PHOTOGRAPHS

## Watching malamutes play

with other canines is a pastime that lifts the human spirit. Malamutes, like many dogs, play with abandon as they wrestle, play tug-of-war, and share in games of chase. In response to dog owners' desire for dog play and the owners' busy lives, dog daycare centers arose as a natural extension of boarding kennels. Dog daycare facilities exist in most parts of the United States and offer owners a safe, controlled environment where their dogs can learn to socialize and exercise appropriately with other dogs. As malamute owners know, our breed has distinct traits. Knowledge of these traits coupled with a basic understanding of the many daycare options will help malamute owners successfully find the right daycare for their companion.

Dog daycare exists in many forms, but nearly all daycare facilities offer some form of group play. The main varieties of daycare are in-home centers, daycare only commercial centers and combination daycare and boarding commercial



### Unusual Tails: How Daycares Can Plan for Malamutes

Malamutes are independent and can be strong-willed. Daycare staff should understand this to avoid behavior problems that could arise by trying to force a malamute to behave like a Labrador or Golden retriever. Malamutes are notorious for their high prey drive; thus, daycare facilities that combine small and large dogs are often not a good fit. Many daycare facilities offer play groups sorted with same sex

aggression in mind. Malamutes can be same sex aggressive, and if your malamute is, look for a center with flexibility in play group organization. Last, the malamute is an independent problem solver that often "solves" containment fencing. When touring the facility, check to be sure your malamute will stay safely contained by the center's fencing and gate systems.



#### TRY THIS ON FOR SIZE

Responsible daycare facilities divide dogs into different play groups based on size and temperament.



#### THE SOCIAL NETWORK

Daycare can allow malamute puppies to learn appropriate play behavior from other well socialized dogs.



#### WITH RECKLESS ABANDON

Watching malamutes happily wrestling is a joy.

facilities. Some are franchises, such as the nationalized Camp Bow Wow, and others are private enterprises, such as Hemingway's Happy Hounds of Twin Falls, Idaho.

When selecting a daycare for a malamute, one of the first things an owner should look for is a facility that divides dogs into different play groups based on size and temperament. A large malamute could easily unintentionally injure a small or medium size dog. Responsible facilities recognize this safety concern and will only place a malamute with similar size dogs.

The division of dogs by size is especially important if a new malamute owner is using daycare to properly socialize their puppy with other dogs. Precocious malamute puppies need to learn appropriate play behavior from other well socialized dogs. Many daycares offer "puppy preschool" days where new puppies are allowed to play with each other and other well socialized young adult dogs. If you, the malamute owner, do not have access to other canine "teachers" for your puppy, daycare can offer the necessary socialization.

## CANINE CAMPUS



✦ **The Party Animal**  
Daycare can give your mal an opportunity to exercise appropriately with other dogs.



### Emergency Preparedness

Ask daycares what their procedures are to prevent fights and how they discipline dogs. Staff should be trained in basic first aid, and an agreement should be in place for emergency veterinary care.

In addition, malamute owners should look for daycare centers that are familiar with the traits specific to malamutes. Staff must understand breed specific behavior in order to keep your malamute and other clients' dogs safe. It may be up to

you as the owner to act as an ambassador for the breed and explain certain behaviors.

Malamute owners should also:

- ✦ Tour the facility during tour hours. Any responsible daycare will offer tours, but hours may vary.

## Top Ten Daycare Checklist

1. Tour Facility
2. Assess Cleanliness
3. Play Group Structure
4. Nap Time Length
5. Staff Training/First Aid
6. Dog to Staff Ratio
7. Handling Discipline
8. Emergency Vet Care?
9. Indoor vs Outdoor
10. Ask Questions



### SLEEP, BABY, SLEEP

Naps and down-time at daycare help prevent dogs from becoming over-tired and grouchy with other dogs.

### INSIDE OUT

Ask whether the dog center offers indoor and outdoor access at the dog's discretion and be sure to look at both areas.





- ❖ Look to see that the center is visibly clean and smells clean (dog smell is acceptable, but not that of stale urine).
- ❖ Ask how long the dogs play in group and how long nap time is. Naps prevent dogs from becoming over-tired and grouchy with other dogs. Naps should be at least one hour; two to three hours is ideal.
- ❖ Ask if the staff is certified in basic first aid and dog behavior, if they have a veterinary technician on staff, or what other training is required of staff.
- ❖ Ask what the dog-to-staff ratio will be. This ratio should be similar to a child daycare.
- ❖ Ask what the staff does to prevent fights, how they end a fight, and if/how they discipline dogs. Positive reinforcement should be used in daycare settings as much as possible. Discipline should consist of time-outs or the use of water bottles. Physical negative reinforcement, such as rolling a malamute or other dominant displays, can cause fights between other dogs in group play.
- ❖ Find out if the center has access to emergency veterinary care through an agreement with a local veterinary hospital.
- ❖ Inquire whether the dog center offers indoor and outdoor access at the dog's discretion. Indoor only facilities exist in urban areas; if visiting one of these, find out how they handle dog waste. Ask to view both indoor and outdoor areas. Outdoor play yards, especially those with a pea-gravel

base, should be well shaded and may offer wading pools during the hot summer months.

- ❖ Most importantly, ask questions and make sure you are confident the facility is capable of handling the unique needs of a malamute.

If you find a daycare facility that meets your standards, you as the owner should be prepared to abide by the policies and procedures of the facility and to answer questions about your dog. Depending on the structure of group play, the daycare center may even require an interview with your malamute. Play group compatibility and socialization are tested during this interview. Dogs often behave differently with an owner in the immediate vicinity, so do not expect that you will participate in this process. During daycare group play, your malamute will share water and toys with other dogs. All dogs can carry communicable diseases and parasites to which your malamute could be exposed through the shared water and toys. Responsible daycare centers require vaccinations, and owners should expect to provide current proof of vaccinations. The center may also require a proof of spay or neuter after the malamute is six months of age. Your intact malamute may be perfectly behaved with both sexes, but other clients' dogs may react negatively to your unaltered malamute. This policy prevents fighting and injuries. Check with the facility about their requirements as they vary by state. Some facilities also require specific types of collars, so do your research and purchase one if necessary. If a daycare has specific drop off times, the owner must also be on time. Play groups become established the longer they are together and conflicts can arise when a new dog is introduced into an established pack. Respecting facility rules ensures your malamute will have a fun and safe experience.

During the course of non-aggressive play, it is normal for a malamute to acquire a few minor scrapes, scratches, and crusty or missing hair. Malamutes use their bodies, mouths, and paws to play and the occasional injury will happen. Check your malamute over carefully after daycare and report any major concerns to the staff.

The malamute owner has a responsibility to inform staff of any special health concerns, even minor ones, when using a daycare facility. Behavioral concerns such as resource guarding, shyness, and most important, escape-artist tendencies should also be shared with staff. Shared information will contribute to the safe interaction of your malamute with other dogs and the center's staff.

There are many factors to consider when choosing a daycare facility appropriate for a malamute. Dog daycare can be a wonderful tool to socialize your malamute and to provide an opportunity for dynamic exercise. However, daycare should never be a substitute for exercise with you, the owner. Malamutes need physical and mental stimulation. Walks together offer the opportunity for bonding, exercise, and are mentally stimulating for malamutes. Ultimately you, the owner, know your dog's personality and exercise needs and can make an informed decision about whether or not daycare is the right choice for your malamute.

### About the Author

*Liz Copp is finishing her senior university studies in English Education at Idaho State University. She and her husband, four dogs, and foster malamutes enjoy hiking and backpacking in the West's vast wilderness. Liz has been involved in malamute rescue for two years and all breed rescue for four years. She and her dogs also compete in amateur agility and obedience trials. Questions or comments can be directed to [liz@moonsongmals.org](mailto:liz@moonsongmals.org).*