

# How to Hire a Professional Pet Sitting & Dog Walking Company

A Pet Parent's Guide



# Your Guide to Pet Sitters & Dog Walkers



Hello all pet parents!

My name is Shannon, and I've lived in the Columbus area for more than 12 years. My husband Steve and I married in 2007 and have always shared a deep love for animals. We have three furry babies of our own: Brody, a six year old Saint Bernard, Brutus, an eleven year old Husky/German Shepherd Mix and Brylee, a three year old Saint Bernard/Newfoundland Mix. When Steve and I learned that we could not have children, our dogs became our kids. We live to spoil them each and every day.

I worked in the advertising industry for over 15 years, so I know firsthand how challenging it can be to provide the care our pets need with our busy schedules. We all want the best for our pets, but sometimes we just cannot do all of the work ourselves.

I wanted to help other busy pet parents with convenient, high-quality pet care that they could trust. So in October 2015, I took the plunge by starting Furball Fitness and have not looked back! Fulfilling my dream of running a business dedicated to animals has been more rewarding than I could have imagined.

Because choosing a pet care professional is not easy, I wanted to create a guide to help owners understand the different options out there and how to choose which is best for them and their pets. After all, our pets are part of our families. You want them to be loved and cared for just like you would if you were there.

I hope this guide helps you in your decision, and we here at Furball Fitness wish all the best for you and your pets!

Shannon Anello

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# Section 1: Why Hire a Pet Care Company

## Pet Care Options



Every owner needs help caring for their pets at some point in their lives. When these situations come up, whether it's every day, once a week, or over a weekend, pet parents need to evaluate their options. For most people, their list looks like this:

- Boarding facility/"doggie daycare" center
- Trusted friend, neighbor, or family member
- Individual dog walker or pet sitter
- An app, such as Rover
- Dedicated pet care company, such as Furball Fitness

Each option has its own pros and cons, but we personally think that a dedicated pet care company is the best option for most pet care needs. Why? Let's look at each other option a little more closely:

### **Boarding Facility**

Boarding facilities may be the most convenient if you will be away for an extended period, but using it daily is actually not the best option for many dogs and owners.

Unless there is a boarding facility right next to your home or office, it can add significant time to your commute (not to mention getting your dog ready and into the car). Pick-up and drop-off times may be strict, and it often seems like there are many hidden fees and charges. Not to mention, at most boarding facilities, dogs are left alone for the majority of the day, with only a few short bathroom breaks included. You will likely have to pay more for one-on-one play and cuddle time.

Why would you go to the extra effort for your dog to simply sit in an unfamiliar kennel most of the day? Not to mention that for dogs with any anxiety issues, special medication needs, or who dislike barking, these facilities can be stressful and scary.

### **Friend, neighbor, or family member**

This is a natural choice for many of us. They may live nearby, you know them and trust them, and your dog or other pets may even already know them. But unfortunately, even the most supportive friends and family members may have other circumstances come up. This is not their job; they are doing it as a favor.

All too often, we have clients who previously used friends and neighbors for pet care, only to come to us after there has been a problem. People forget and people have other priorities. Only by choosing a professional pet care service can you be sure that your pets are their number one priority.

## Individual Dog Walker or Pet Sitter

There are many individual dog walkers and pet sitters who simply run their own business through word-of-mouth or fliers in a local grocery store or restaurant. While these individuals are often good at their jobs, unfortunately a one-man operation does not have a team to provide support when needed. What happens if this pet sitter gets in an accident on their way to your home? Without a team to call on, your pets may be left alone until the pet sitter can get there or you can find someone else to come over. Other negatives to using an individual could be limited or inconvenient payment options, scheduling difficulties, and no insurance.

## An app, such as Rover

As part of the sharing economy, apps that help connect pet owners with convenient pet care have sprung up. These apps help owners find highly-rated pet care in their area, with the support of a larger company.

It basically helps individual dog walkers have access to convenient payment and scheduling as well as customer service and support. If a conflict arises, many of the apps will help you find a replacement, but it is still ultimately your responsibility.

And while some apps require a background check, there is no hiring process that only selects highly qualified individuals. You can only rely on intuition and reviews.

## Furball Fitness

Using a dedicated pet care company, like Furball Fitness, is ideal for many pets and pet parents. We're a small enough team that pets and owners can get to know all of us, but big enough to provide backup and support in case any unforeseen situations arise with any of our employees.

We only hire the best people to ensure that they are equipped to handle all pets and all scenarios. Scheduling and payment are easy and convenient. And your pets can stay comfortable at home, with plenty of dedicated play and cuddle time.

## Questions to Ask Potential Companies



Dog walking and pet sitting require a lot of trust. After all, your pets are part of the family, and you want to make sure they are in the best hands. Not to mention that you may be giving the sitter access to your home.

Online reviews can help you make a decision, but we recommend talking with a sitter or having a meet-and-greet with the sitter and your pets before making a decision. Here are some questions to ask to make sure you find the best pet care

## **1. How long has the company been in business?**

Just because a company has been in business for a long time does not mean that it is necessarily better than a new company, but it does mean they have more experience. With pets, there are always new and unique situations that arise, and you want to make sure that the company has experience with a wide range of potential problems.

## **2. Who are the pet sitters?**

You need to know who will be in your home and caring for your pet. Have all of the sitters had a background check? Any professional company should follow this protocol. Do they know pet first aid and pet CPR? The best pet sitters are trained to care for your pets in emergencies. Are they employees, independent contractors, or hobby sitters? The liability if there is an accident may be different in each scenario, so make sure you know who is responsible.

## **3. What are the back-up plans in case of emergency?**

One of the biggest benefits of using a company instead of an individual is that a company should have a back-up plan in case of an emergency. People get sick or get in car accidents and can no longer care for your pet. You need to have peace of mind that the company has a plan for when those situations arise.

## **4. Is there a contract or other paperwork?**

While paperwork can be annoying to fill out, any reputable company will have some level of paperwork involved when you first sign up. You and the pet sitter should have a clear outline of what services will be provided, how and when payment is accepted, and critical pet information, such as veterinary information and any special needs.

## **5. How will the company keep you updated on your pet?**

We all want to know that our pets are healthy, happy, and safe. Different companies have different methods for communicating with you about a visit. It could be via an email, text, or app. You might get information on how long the sitter was there, what they did, how much your pet ate, pictures, and more. You need to make sure you get enough information on your pet to feel secure that your pets are being well taken care of.

## **6. What technology does the company use?**

While technology may not seem that important, we all want to work with a company that makes it convenient and easy to work with and communicate with them. This is especially important if you will be using their services fairly regularly. Scheduling and payment should be easy and secure. Some companies have apps that have all of your account information easily accessible right from your phone. Hiring a company with good technology will make the entire process easier for you.

## 7. Does the company have insurance and bonding and worker's compensation policies?

These policies help protect you, the owner, from liability issues if there were to be an accident or incident while caring for your pets. These policies are crucial to having true piece of mind when hiring a pet care company, and it is one of the biggest differences between hiring a company and relying on an individual. Because these are so important, the next section dives into these two policies.



## Insurance and Bonding and Worker's Compensation: Why are they important?

Even with the best companies and the best pets, accidents happen. If they happen to you, you want to make sure that you do not end up responsible. Insurance and Bonding and Worker's Compensation help protect you in case of an incident.

Insurance and bonding varies, but generally covers accidents and incidents that damages a pet, the sitter, another person, or any property while in the sitter's care.

Here are some examples of situations where this could be important:

- Your dog bites another dog while on a walk
- Your cat scratches the sitter's face
- While playing with your dog, the sitter throws a toy that breaks a lamp
- Your dog steps on a piece of glass while on a walk and has to go to the vet to have it removed
- The sitter slips on ice while walking your dog

In all of these situations, you are not held responsible for any of the damage if the company has appropriate insurance and bonding and worker's compensation policies. The sitter or other injured parties cannot sue you for damages.

These policies also protect the sitter in these circumstances. You may not think it is important for the sitter protected, but it can also help you. For example, imagine your pet ingests something it shouldn't while in your sitter's care and requires expensive veterinary care. While you do not want to be responsible for that bill, you may not want your sitter to be responsible either. If it was genuinely an accident, you may not want your sitter to be financially strapped because of the veterinary bill either. Having insurance means that these incidents are covered.

Not all companies have employees covered under these policies. You should always check that they have taken the proper precautions to protect their clients and their employees.

# Section 2: Why Choose Furball Fitness?

## About Us



Furball Fitness is a dog walking and pet care company servicing the Columbus, Ohio area. Founded in 2015 by Shannon Anello, we have since grown to include three other full-time employees.

All of our employees are members of Pet Sitters International, Pet Sitters Associates, National Association of Professional Pet Sitters (NAPPS), and Columbus Ohio Professional Pet Sitters. We have all been PSI Background Check approved. We are also certified in Pet CPR, Pet First Aid, Puppy Training, and Dog Training.

We all adore animals and bring unconditional love to the pets in our care. We are equipped to care for all personalities imaginable. From the social and playful “stars of the park” to the formerly abused, and from the newborn to the elderly, we are proud to be able to help them all. We are honored to be trusted with your pets.

Because we know how much pet parents in the Columbus area love their pets, we want to make pet care as easy and convenient for you as possible. We aim to provide a wide variety of services that are easily scheduled via our app so that you can have peace of mind that your pets are getting the love and attention they need.

## Services

### **Dog Walking**

Taking your dog for regular walks help reduce unwanted behaviors, helps them manage their weight, and generally stay healthy. But sometimes our human schedules get in the way of regular walks. You can hire Furball Fitness for walks varying from 15 minutes to an hour, depending on how much activity your dog needs. Whether you need a dog walker almost every day, or just when you get too busy, you can count on us.

All dog walks include the following:

- Walk around your neighborhood or nearby park
- Food and water refills
- Any needed medications
- Pictures via text and email

### **Cat Care (and other pets)**

Cats need attention, too! Just because they may not need to go outside for a potty break does not mean that our cats don't need cared for. When you need help caring for your cat, whether because you're working a lot, injured, or out of town, our cat care services can help give your cat the attention it needs.



All cat care visits include the following:

- Playtime, belly rubs, and scratches
- Food and water refills
- Any needed medications
- Litter box cleanup
- Pictures via text and email

### **Pet Sitting Visits**

When you're out of town and need help caring for your pets, Furball Fitness can come and help, no matter how many or what kind of pets you have. From dogs and cats to iguanas and birds, we've seen it all.

All pet sitting visits include the following:

- Playtime and petting
- Food and water refills
- Any needed medications
- Pictures via text and email
- Anything else you need – just ask us! Water plants, pick up your mail, and anything else that you need help with while you're away

### **Overnight Stays**

For those pets that need a little more love and attention, we also offer overnight stays for when you are out of town. Our overnight stays include everything in our pet sitting visits, but we will stay overnight. When you book an overnight stay, it includes a 12-hour stay from evening until the morning and one mid-day visit.

## Mobile Grooming & Spa

Regular grooming is a necessity for many pets. It helps keep them comfortable and helps prevent and spot potential health problems. To help busy pet parents, we offer mobile grooming services that can be added on to a dog walking, cat care, or pet sitting visit.

We currently offer brushing, nail trimming, and baths. We have the portable BarkBath groomer by Bissell, which allows us to easily bathe your dogs at home with no mess and no bathtub needed.

## Pet Taxi

If you already have a groomer you love, you could also utilize our pet taxi service to take your pet to his appointments when you're unavailable. Where do we go?

- Veterinary appointments
- Grooming appointments
- Kennel or boarding facility
- Friend or family member's house
- Important event (e.g., a wedding)
- Anywhere else in the Columbus area!



## Pet Waste Removal/Yard Clean-Up

If your yard is so littered with doggy "bombs" that you no longer can enjoy it, let us do the cleaning for you! You can set up recurring appointments so that you no longer have to worry about cleaning up your yard before you can use it.

## Wedding Sitter

Our furballs are members of our family, but including them in your wedding can be a logistical challenge! Instead of trying to have a family member or friend (who wants to be there to enjoy the day with you, not play puppy sitter), hire us

to help your pup be a part of your big day. We not only make sure your pets are fed, watered, and have used the restroom, but we can also assist with the following:

- Pick up and drop off to the ceremony, reception, home, etc.
- Walk/carry him down the aisle
- Babysit while you get ready or during the reception
- Assist with pictures



If there's anything else you can think of, just ask us! This unique service helps brides and grooms relax and enjoy the wedding day with their pups.

## Meet & Greet

Meeting your pets before caring for them is a great way for you and your pets to get to know us, for us to get to know your pets, and to make sure the visits go smoothly. A meet and greet is mandatory for all new clients.

The meet and greet usually lasts 30 to 60 minutes, depending on the number of pets you have and the level of care they need. Here is what we cover:

- Introduction to all pets
- Design a pet care plan to meet your pets' needs
- Walk-through to find location of all needed items (leashes, toys, medicine, food, etc.)
- Create plan for entering and exiting the property
- Review and sign required documents (Application, Medical Release, Policies & Procedures, Owner's Agreement)
- Answer any questions you have!

For backup reasons (in case the battery goes out in the garage or door key pad or a key doesn't work for some reason), Furball Fitness requires at least 2 copies of a key or at least 2 ways into the home.

Here are some key options:

1. Purchase a lock box from us or anywhere of your choosing with a hide-away key or have a key on file with us.
2. We keep your keys on file in a secure place.
3. Schedule a key pick-up and drop-off (\$12 each way).
4. Give us a garage or key pad code with a hide-away key in case the power or battery goes out.
5. Or hide 2 copies of the key in a secure place of your choosing (2 copies are needed in case for some reason one of the keys doesn't work).

## Communication and Technology

We believe that good technology and communication is key to an easy client experience. That is why we use the pet sitting software Time to Pet, which is trusted by over 500 pet sitting and dog walking companies around the world.

Every client has a client portal that houses all of your critical Furball Fitness communication. It features:

- Unique profiles pages for each pet
- Home address and information, such as security codes
- Contact information for you, the emergency contact, and your veterinarian
- Ability to schedule, reschedule, and cancel visits, plus room for comments about a particular visit
- See and pay all invoices via credit card or by linking a bank account
- Conversation feature that links to your personal phone or email, but still stores the conversation in the portal

The conversation feature is one of our favorites – it allows you to read and reply to the conversation via text and email, but if your phone were to get lost or stolen, you could still access the portal with

your login information from any device. It stores pictures and information about the visits, so a spouse or significant other can also check in, even if he or she is not the primary contact.

Our clients love our portal. It makes caring for your pets easy and fast. You can also visit the Time to Pet website, [TimeToPet.com](http://TimeToPet.com), if you want to learn more about the software.

We also have an app, which is a one-stop shop for everything Furball Fitness:

- Our Facebook page
- Our blog
- Your loyalty program status
- News about deals and promotions
- Access to the client portal
- A photo gallery
- FitBark
- Videos



If you are an existing client, you can download the app and login to the client portal to start managing your account. If you are new, you can use the app to learn more about our business and what we offer. Download it today at the iTunes or Google Play store!

## Have questions? Want to know more?

If you want to learn more about pet sitting or Furball Fitness, here are a few ways you can connect with us:

- Visit our website, [www.FurballFitnessPetCare.com](http://www.FurballFitnessPetCare.com)
- Visit our blog, [www.FurballFitnessPetCare.com/blog](http://www.FurballFitnessPetCare.com/blog)
- Follow us on Facebook
- Call us at 419.290.4207
- Request a meet and greet

We can't wait to hear from you. Reach out today to find out how Furball Fitness Pet Care can help you and your pets!