

Group Play Info Packet

Kritter Kare's Howliday Inn

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Our Programs

Before we start talking about the ins and outs of group play, we want you to know that daycare is not the only service that we offer at The Howliday Inn. We have three programs that are tailored to work for every dog in our care. The care we offer is personalized to your dog's needs and interests, not just a one-size-fits-all program that your dog is expected to fit into.

Our **Daycare** program is designed for social dogs with good self-regulation skills who can socialize well for longer periods of time. This includes a combination of group play, rest breaks, and small group training and enrichment time.

Our **Enrichment** program is designed for dogs who cannot socialize at a large or small group capacity, whatever the reason may be. This includes a morning and afternoon enrichment session which may consist of a walk, one-on-one play with a staff member, and/or a mental stimulation toy.

Our **Hybrid Socialization** program is designed for dogs who can socialize but may have limits to who they can play with, how long they can play, or may need to learn better socialization and energy regulation skills before being approved for a full day of daycare. This includes a morning enrichment session and an afternoon small group play session with select dogs.

Group Play at The Howliday Inn

We do group play a little differently at our facility. We are not as focused on the ratio of dogs to staff as we are on building play groups that work for every dog in our care. That being said, we do uphold a ratio of 1 staff member per 10 dogs in a playgroup and we cap our play groups at a total of 12 dogs. Our average play group size is around 8 dogs as we feel this is large enough to keep the dogs engaged and socializing but not so large that it is overstimulating to the dogs or the staff.

We keep detailed behavior notes on every dog in our care including a list of dogs they play well with and dogs that they do not get along with. Dogs will not like every dog they meet and some dogs, despite really liking each other, do not play well together because they get too excited and lose the ability to regulate their energy. Because of this we run mixed play groups of different energy levels and play styles to balance out each group.

Evaluations

Our evaluation process is designed to assess a number of different behaviors in each individual dog. We check for things such as barrier frustration (leash and fence reactivity), social skills, stress and anxiety levels, excitement levels, resource guarding, and interest in engaging with other dogs. Each dog responds differently to these new experiences and the idea of group play. Our evaluation of your dog is simply a reflection of how your dog seems to feel about the idea of doggie daycare. Many social dogs are not a great fit for group play for a variety of factors.

We use the **Sociability Scale** below to determine each dog's interest and desire to socialize.

Hyper-Social —-- Social —-- Neutral —-- Selective —-- Aggressive

We prefer that the dogs fall somewhere in the Social to Neutral range but some Hyper-Social and Selective dogs are able to fit into a play group without issue. However, dogs at the further ends of the spectrum are more likely to struggle with group play.

It should go without saying that Aggressive types are not a good fit for group play, however, any dog can aggress or cause altercations which is something we will cover later on in this packet.

We also use our own **Energy Level Scale** to identify how each dog chooses to spend their time in play group. This can change and fluctuate over time, so our assessments are an on-going process.

1 - Keeps to themself

2 - Plays with select friends

3 - Balances play with rest

4 - Plays hard but can regulate their energy

5 - Poor self-regulation skills

Our two-day evaluation process is designed to slowly introduce your dog to the idea of group play so we can see how they adjust.

Day One is done in 2 parts. Part one consists of a *morning enrichment session which includes a walk by our daycare yard* so they can see the play groups through the fence. This helps us test for things like barrier frustration and overall interest and comfort level around other dogs. Part two consists of a *small group introduction to daycare.* The dog will meet anywhere from 5-7 other dogs in a 30-45 minute time

frame. This is where we look at most of the criteria for proper interactions, excitement and stress levels, and intentions to socialize.

If all goes well on day one, **Day Two** consists of the morning daycare session and afternoon small group session. Our *morning daycare session* is usually a larger play group with an hour play session, 30 minutes of rest, and another hour play session before the lunch and nap period. This is where we look at how the dog responds to the things happening around them such as engaging in play, policing play, or completely avoiding interactions. We also keep an eye on their stress and excitement levels while being expected to play longer and rest in a crate. In *afternoon small group enrichment* we often use toys and treats to do structured play and training exercises for basic daycare skills that help us create harmony in our play groups. In this session we look for things like resource guarding and frustration levels to determine if the dog is able to share and regulate themselves with valuable items in a group setting.

Our Social Evaluation Checklist helps us to keep track of all of these behaviors.

Suggestions and Requirements

If you are thinking that this process seems complex let us take this time to tell you why. We first need to break the stigma that domestic dogs are “pack animals.” They are not. Years of selective breeding and socialization with humans have changed their attitudes and responses to group socialization. Even if they were pack animals, dogs and people outside of their homes would not be considered part of their pack. Dogs are social animals who learn through play and they do have a social hierarchy structure that ranges from dominant to submissive, but it is rarely ever a black and white concept.

We state the above to say this: Group play is not a natural thing for adult dogs to engage in, which is why we take our process and our work so seriously.

After being evaluated and selecting a socialization plan, we ask that you bring your dog once every two weeks to maintain socialization but no more than three days a week to avoid over-socialization. It can be difficult to readapt to the idea of group play if they are away for too long, which is why we uphold our suggestions and requirements. For dogs who are away for 3-6 months, we require a 1-day reevaluation process and for anything over 6 months we require a 2-day full reevaluation process.

You may also see some changes in your dog after they start engaging in group play. They may show more leash reactivity or fence reactivity toward other dogs because

they are now accustomed to having free access to playmates at daycare. If you see an increase in reactivity, frustration, or excitement around other dogs you may need to consult a trainer to help you work with your dog to better regulate their excitement.

Vaccinations and Physical Health

To ensure the health of all of the dogs in our care and reduce the risk of contagious illnesses, we require the following vaccinations and health checks.

- Bordetella (canine cough)
- DHPP (distemper, hepatitis, parvo virus, parainfluenza)
- Lepto (leptospirosis)
- Rabies
- Canine Influenza
- Yearly fecal exam
- Flea, Tick, and Heartworm preventative

We also ask that you do not bring your dog in to socialize if they are showing any symptoms of illness such as: vomiting, diarrhea, coughing, unusual eye or nose discharge, or skin irritation (unless cleared as non-contagious).

Spay and Neuter Policy

The current veterinary science on spay and neutering is suggesting waiting up to 6 months for small breed dogs, up to 1 year for large breeds, and up to 2 years for giant breeds before sterilization surgery. The reason for this is to get dogs through their essential growth periods so the hormones can tell their joints when to stop growing and it also greatly decreases the risk of cancer later in life.

To fall in line with this research our spay and neuter policy is similar to what is listed above.

- Small Dogs: Up to 7 months
- Large Dogs: Up to 1 year
- Giant Breeds: Up to 2 years

The exceptions on whether to spay/neuter earlier or later will be as follows:

- If the hormones are causing unwanted behavior in the dog such as conflict-seeking behaviors, obsessive mounting, excessive marking, or aggression.

- It becomes difficult to group the dog safely due to other dog's behavior toward them.
- Females must be spayed after their first heat cycle before coming back to play group.

Altercation Policy

While we would love to say that we are a completely altercation-free facility, the truth is, there are no guarantees on whether or not your dog will experience an altercation while socializing in any context. This is part of the reason that our evaluation process and note keeping practices are so detailed, we are always screening for the potential for conflict. Even though we do our best to group dogs appropriately, dogs are unpredictable and accidents do happen. Mild conflict between dogs is a normal part of their communication system but some dogs are more willing to engage in conflict than others. Our altercation policy exists to help weed out dogs who show an increased interest in conflict or engage in conflict at an inappropriate level.

We utilize Dr. Ian Dunbar's Dog Bite Scale and our own Altercation Assessment system to address these situations and come to a decision on how to proceed with socializing the dogs in our care.

FAQ

Why do the dogs only get 2-3 hours of time outside per day?

1. Our canine friends require more daily sleep than humans. The suggested amount of rest for dogs is between 8-20 hours of sleep per day with the average being between 10 and 14 hours. It is essential that we let the dogs turn themselves off and learn how to regulate their energy while fulfilling their need for rest.
2. You wouldn't take your dog to the dog park for 3-8 hours a day because it would be too overstimulating and physically tiring. We prefer to balance play with rest and enrichment. We promise you, your dog will still come home tired, but it will be from active fulfillment of their needs, not stress related exhaustion.
3. To reduce the spread of contagious illnesses, we limit access to shared water bowls. Because of this, we do not allow the dogs to go more than 1 hour without access to water as this reduces the risk of dehydration. We also tend

to see a phenomenon where the dogs start acting up if they are parched, we call it “Fur-sty” or furiously thirsty.

4. We take a long midday break so the dogs can get adequate rest and have time to eat lunch if the owner has provided one. Dogs should rest for at least 1 hour after eating to avoid bloat, a health risk affecting the stomach that restricts the airway and often ends in death.
5. Working a dog’s brain burns four times more energy than physical exercise. Small group enrichment and training is designed to engage your dog’s senses and teach them how to problem solve.