# The Caregiver Checklist: Finding the Best Care for Your Labrador

Life is busy, and it often takes us away from home. Whether it's a weeklong vacation with the grandkids, that upcoming business trip you've been dreading, or simply long days at the office that drag into the evening, you can't take your Labrador with you everywhere — as much as they wish you could.

Labradors aren't independent dogs. They thrive with human companionship and connection. More than that, they need a structured, consistent routine and plenty of exercise to help them stay healthy and out of trouble.

There are plenty of pet care options out there, but it's easy to worry that no one else will take care of your dog the way you do. Choosing a caregiver isn't simply about finding someone available. It's about finding someone qualified, trustworthy, and ready to take care of *your* individual Lab.

In this guide, we'll walk through the major care options, the questions you should ask, and red flags to avoid when seeking care for your Labrador Retriever.

## Which Type of Care Is Right for Your Labrador?

As a dog owner, you have three primary choices when searching for someone to watch your Lab: a professional in-home pet sitter, a boarding kennel, or friends and family. Each option comes with pros and cons.

### Professional In-Home Pet Sitter

For many dogs, having an experienced professional come directly to them can be a great option when you're away.

"When pet parents select a professional pet sitter to come to their home, they ensure that their dog gets to stay in the comfort of their familiar environment, maintain their regular routines, and avoid exposure to illness," says Beth Stultz-Hairston, president of Pet Sitters International (PSI).

In-home pet sitting can be expensive, and you may not feel comfortable inviting a stranger into your home. But for senior Labs, mildly anxious Labs, or Labs who simply like their routine, pet sitting can be an enormous relief.

### Boarding Kennel

In addition to dedicated kennels that are solely for boarding, many veterinarians offer boarding services, too. At a kennel, there will be staff available throughout the day, helping provide the dogs with structured routines and social opportunities. However, the increased stimulation and exposure to other dogs may not be ideal for every temperament.

If your dog deals with extreme anxiety or significant health issues that need around-the-clock supervision, care at a location such as a veterinary boarding facility may be the smartest option.

### Friends and Family

Finally, you can also consider asking your friends and family members to act as in-home pet sitters, or dropping off your dog to stay at their home. It's a friendly face that's often less expensive and more flexible.

But keep in mind the drawbacks here, too: Since your friends (most likely) aren't professionals, they have a lack of experience that could affect your dog's safety or health.

No matter which type of care you're considering, the key is asking the right questions.

## Questions to Ask Every Caregiver

Whether you're considering a boarding kennel, hiring a professional pet sitter, or asking a trusted friend or family member to help, it's worth having a conversation ahead of time. Boarding kennels should allow you to tour their facilities before booking a stay, while professional pet sitters will schedule a meet-and-greet before you give them your keys. Even if your caregiver is someone you know well, discussing expectations in advance can help prevent misunderstandings.

Not every question will apply in every situation — you wouldn't ask your sister for proof of liability insurance — but the list below can help guide conversations with any potential caregiver.

- Are you licensed (if required locally)?
- Are you insured? Can you show me proof?
- Have you had a background check? Can you show me proof?
- Do you use a written service agreement?
- What training or certifications do you have?
- Can you provide references, or reviews from current or past clients?
- Have you cared for Labradors before?
- What happens if you become sick or unavailable?
- What is your emergency protocol?
- How often will you provide updates?
- Do you administer medication if needed? Is that included in the cost?

- How much exercise will my Lab receive?

“A professional pet sitter or dog walker will ensure they are following all local laws, including obtaining a business license or permit if required in their area,” says Stultz-Hairston. “They should also have general liability insurance designed specifically for pet-sitting businesses, and be able to provide proof of their clear criminal history. Owners can also inquire about specific trainings the pet sitter has completed, such as a pet first aid course, or certifications they have obtained, such as PSI’s CPPS-Certified Professional Pet Sitter® designation.”

## Before You Hand Over The Leash

Whether you’re hiring a professional or relying on someone you know, a good caregiver should welcome questions and be upfront about expectations.

And sometimes, what a caregiver *doesn’t* do is just as important.

“If the pet sitter does not schedule an initial consultation (prior to confirming your booking) or use a pet sitting contract or service agreement, those are red flags,” Stultz-Hairston explains.

Additional red flags for a pet sitter or boarding kennel include:

- Won’t provide references
- Doesn’t ask questions about your dog
- Doesn’t ask for your veterinarian’s information
- Doesn’t discuss emergency plans
- Communicates poorly
- Has vague pricing
- Overbooks clients
- Appears rushed

Specifically for a boarding kennel, it’s not a good sign if the kennel smells bad or looks dirty; doesn’t require proof of vaccination; or puts too many dogs together in a small play yard.

## Caring for a Labrador’s Unique Needs

Every Lab owner knows that these high-energy dogs need plenty of physical and mental stimulation. If you can, select a caregiver that has experience working with retrievers and meeting these needs.

Every Lab owner knows that these high-energy dogs need plenty of physical and mental stimulation. Whether your dog is staying with a professional sitter, a boarding kennel or a family member, sharing these details can help your caregiver keep your Lab happy and safe.

Make sure to also disclose any medical issues, allergies, your dog's leash habits, and whether they have a tendency to counter surf (especially for an in-home pet sitter). This helps ensure your dog will stay happy, safe, and receive the best possible customized care.

Regardless of who is caring for your dog, don't ask them to rely on memory. Instead, leave (or send along) written instructions. The American Animal Hospital Association recommends including your dog's feeding schedule, medications, microchip information, favorite routines, emergency contacts (including your vet), a current photo, and (for pet sitters) any household rules, such as whether your Lab is allowed on furniture or sleeps in a crate. The more information you provide, the easier it is for your caregiver to keep your dog's routine consistent.

## Investing in Peace of Mind

"In the digital age, anyone can post online that they're offering pet sitting services," Stultz-Hairston points out. "But opting for the 'cheapest' pet care choice can actually be more expensive in the long run. A trained, insured pet-care provider will be best equipped to keep dogs safe and healthy while their owners are away and avoid costly mistakes."

The cost of pet care varies drastically depending on factors like your location, the size and breed of your dog, whether you need overnight care, whether you need care over a holiday, whether your dog needs to be given medication, and more.

You can compare pet sitting and kennel options based on price. But as Stultz-Hairston says: "Cheaper doesn't mean better." During your search, make sure to also compare your options based on:

- Experience
- Insurance
- Training
- Communication
- Reviews
- Professionalism

This will give you a well-rounded picture of the value you're getting for the price you will pay.

"After all, you can't put a price on peace of mind!" Stultz-Hairston says.

## In Good Hands

A good caregiver doesn't simply refill your dog's empty bowls. They provide companionship, notice any changes in your dog's health, and keep your Lab mentally and physically engaged.

Choosing the right caregiver makes every trip and every busy workday a little less stressful for both you and your dog. And that's a choice where it's worth investing your time.