

Professional **Dog Walkers'** Guidelines

Endorsed by:

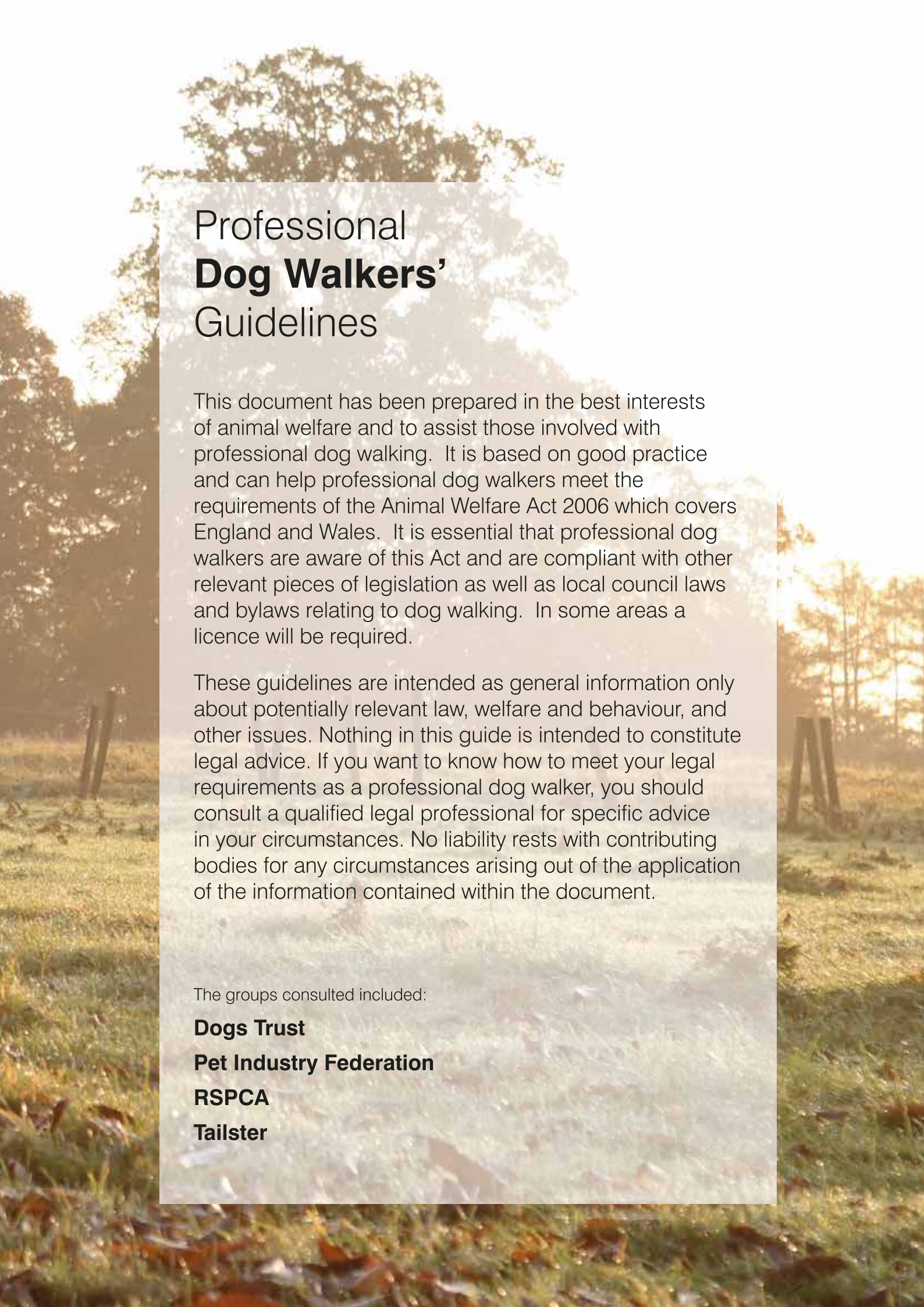
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Professional **Dog Walkers'** Guidelines

This document has been prepared in the best interests of animal welfare and to assist those involved with professional dog walking. It is based on good practice and can help professional dog walkers meet the requirements of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 which covers England and Wales. It is essential that professional dog walkers are aware of this Act and are compliant with other relevant pieces of legislation as well as local council laws and bylaws relating to dog walking. In some areas a licence will be required.

These guidelines are intended as general information only about potentially relevant law, welfare and behaviour, and other issues. Nothing in this guide is intended to constitute legal advice. If you want to know how to meet your legal requirements as a professional dog walker, you should consult a qualified legal professional for specific advice in your circumstances. No liability rests with contributing bodies for any circumstances arising out of the application of the information contained within the document.

The groups consulted included:

Dogs Trust

Pet Industry Federation

RSPCA

Tailster

Introduction

Professional dog walking is becoming an increasingly common service due to the changing habits of the general population and a heightened awareness of animal welfare. This document aims to provide guidelines that professional dog walkers should conform to, ensuring standards of welfare for the dog, respect for the environment and peace of mind for the owner.

The Animal Welfare Act sets the minimum standard required in relation to the welfare of animals.

Animal Welfare Act 2006

As domesticated animals, dogs are protected under the Act. The law says an owner of a dog is always regarded as responsible for him/her. A dog walker is also identified as being responsible for it - whilst he/she is in charge of the dog. So, a dog walker has legal responsibilities and can also be held criminally liable under the Act.



There is a range of current relevant regulations and legislation which a professional dog walker may find relevant:

- **Animal Welfare Act 2006[2]**
- **Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014**
- **The Control of Dogs Order 1992**
- **Countryside & Right of Way Act 2000**
- **Dangerous Dogs Act 1991**
- **The Dangerous Dogs (Amendment) Act 1997**
- **Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996**
- **Dog Fouling – Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005**
- **Dogs Protection of Livestock Act 1953**
- **Environmental Protection Act 1990**
- **Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981**
- **Health and Safety at Work Act 1974**
- **Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999**
- **The Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015**
- **The Microchipping of Dogs (Wales) Regulations 2015**
- **Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992**
- **Regulation on the protection of animals during transport (EC) 1/2005**
- **Welfare of Animals (Transport)(England) Order 2006**
- **Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992**

[2] This act and the subsequent information in this document applies to England and Wales only. There is separate, but similar legislation that covers Scotland (the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006) and also Northern Ireland (the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011). It is strongly recommended that professional dog walkers are aware and fully understand the legislation within their own jurisdiction.

These guidelines have been divided into three sections to cover all aspects of dog walking and should provide a clear set of procedures, which all professional dog walkers should follow:

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Impact on the environment and others 12

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Welfare and behaviour - ensuring **dogs** are **protected**





Understanding a dog's individual needs

The dog's physical health and mental wellbeing should be the priority at all times.

Dogs may have individual conditions that will affect their ability to go for walks, as will their age; and all dogs have their own individual personalities and characteristics which will affect how they are walked, who they can be walked with and where they can be walked. This is of particular importance if dogs do not interact well with other dogs, people or other species. Additionally some dogs will become afraid or worried in some situations e.g. with loud noises.

- The dog walker should meet the dog prior to taking them for a walk so that the walker can become familiar with the dog's needs and that a pre-assessment can be made to evaluate their personality and behavioural characteristics.
- The individual needs of the dog should be discussed and agreed with the owner, and the instructions followed, unless they would cause unnecessary suffering to the dog. This discussion should include the timing, knowledge of the dog's training and the cues used and the duration of the walk.
- The dog walker should be familiar with any medical issues for individual dogs. This should include any medication the dog is on, allergies that might be present and the dog's veterinary practice, including contact details.
- Any walks should be planned with consideration of the dog's age, health, behaviour and fitness.
- Any dog that exhibits fearful, anxious or aggressive behaviour towards other dogs or people should be walked independently and on an appropriate lead and lead length at all times. Consideration should be given to avoid walking in areas where meeting other dogs is likely. An appropriate (basket type) well-fitting and secure muzzle which allows panting, drinking and vomiting might be considered if necessary and with the owner's permission.



Transport

Transporting dogs in vehicles allows an increased variety of walks and interest for the dogs. Dogs can be distracting to the driver and, if loose in a vehicle, can cause accidents. Vehicles are also a source of infection and can result in spread of disease. The interior of vehicles can heat up very quickly, particularly on warm days, and become dangerous to dogs.

- All transport legislation must be followed (Welfare of Animals (Transport)(England) Order 2006).
- Dogs should be transported in vehicles with adequate ventilation and temperature control, with water available.
- Vehicles should be fitted with suitable caging or containment to ensure comfortable and safe transport of the dogs. Restraining with leads or chains must not be used.
- Where more than one dog is transported at the same time, the walker should ensure that the welfare of each dog is safeguarded and that no dog is at risk of injury.
- During extremes of weather consideration should be given to the distance and time travelled in a vehicle and it should be limited, e.g. where a dog is particularly susceptible to heat stroke.
- Dogs should not be left unattended in a vehicle other than for short periods whilst collecting or dropping off. This period should be the absolute minimum time and the vehicle should be locked when unattended.
- All equipment should be capable of being cleaned and be cleaned and disinfected regularly. For example, steam cleaning of upholstery. This is particularly important if there has been an outbreak of disease.



Providing exercise

The equipment used, the way in which the walker interacts with the dogs and how they are walked can have a significant impact on their welfare.

- The dog walker should not conduct any behaviour modification or offer any advice unless they are, in combination, suitably qualified, experienced and knowledgeable. The walker must obtain the owner's express permission.
- The dog walker should not use any equipment which could cause fear, anxiety or distress. For example, electric shock, prong, spray or choke collars.
- The dog walker should check all equipment is well fitting and fit for purpose at the start of each walk.
- The dog walker should not act in any way which would cause fear, anxiety or distress.
- Dog walkers should try to vary the dog's walk to increase interest and stimulation.
- Dog walkers should give full attention at all times to the dog/s under their control.
- Dogs should only be allowed off the lead if prior written permission is obtained from the owner.
- Dogs that are allowed off the lead should be able to be called back to the walker reliably and immediately. If this is not possible, then dogs should be walked on a lead. When dogs are walked on a lead, ideally they should be trained to walk calmly, on a loose lead. The lead should be held in a secure manner, and be maintained at an appropriate length for the situation.
- Bitches in season should be walked in quiet areas and on the lead and walked alone, unless with prior written consent from the owner detailing which dogs the bitch can be walked with.
- Dogs should be provided with adequate fresh water as needed.
- Feeding of treats/food should only be given with prior agreement by the owner.



Group walking

Walking dogs, particularly in groups, results in exposure to infections and disease and not every dog is suitable to be walked with others. Steps should be taken to minimise the risk of disease spreading between animals and to ensure all dogs interact amicably.

- The walker should check that all dogs are vaccinated, wormed and treated for fleas regularly, unless, certified exempt by a veterinary surgeon.
- Dog walkers should be familiar with signs of disease, infection and illness so that dogs showing signs of infectious disease, such as kennel cough, are not walked or socialised with other animals.
- Where dogs are to be walked in pairs or groups, the dog walker should assess each dog's suitability and be assured that each dog will be relaxed and happy during transportation and the walk.
- The maximum number of dogs that can be walked at any one time should not exceed the number stated in the walker's insurance policy and comply with local authority requirements regarding the number of dogs. It is recommended that no more than four dogs are walked at any one time. ALL dogs under a dog walker's care should be reliably under control at all times and transported in accordance with the guidance in this document.
- Dog walkers should ensure they have a lead for each dog.

Returning home

Every effort should be made to ensure the dog is comfortable including towelling down, if appropriate, after the walk.

- Dog walkers should report any concerns about the health, behaviour or welfare of the dog to the client.
- Dog walkers should ensure they securely lock the property when they leave, as instructed by the client.



Lone walking

As a lone worker, dog walkers should take extra precautions to ensure their personal safety. When using a vehicle, full breakdown cover should be in place and any valuables kept out of sight. When walking dogs, walkers should not enter any area where there is a perceived threat and should leave the area if a risk becomes apparent.

- There should be a daily schedule in place documenting where and when pickups, drop offs and walks will take place.
- Dog walkers should carry a charged, mobile phone with them at all times and have emergency numbers on speed dial. Various tracking / locating apps are now available and it is recommended that dog walkers make use of this new technology.

Emergencies

Unforeseen incidents may happen on walks and it is essential that dog walkers are prepared for this eventuality to maintain the welfare of all dogs in their care.

- Dog walkers should have emergency contact details of all owners accessible at all times.
- Prior written agreement should be made between the owner and dog walker over actions if a dog becomes sick or injured during a walk. This should include the authority to seek veterinary attention and the level of decision-making agreed to by the owner, if the owner is not contactable. It should also be confirmed in which veterinary practice this treatment should take place.
- Dog walkers should own a first aid kit designed for dogs and should keep this in a convenient location (ideally the transport vehicle). The dog walker should be trained in canine first aid.

Dog walking - minimising its impact on the environment, other people and animals.



Impact on the environment

Taking dogs for regular walks is essential for the mental and physical well-being of the animals by providing exercise, stimulation and interest to their daily routine. However, walking can impact on the local environment and professional dog walkers should minimise this and show care and respect for the environment whilst also meeting all legal requirements.

Dog waste left in the environment is unhygienic, a health and safety risk for humans and other animals and can cause serious damage to plant and animal communities.

- Dog walkers must pick up faeces from all dogs in their care and ensure this is appropriately sealed and disposed of in suitable dustbins following the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996.
- Dog walkers should have sufficient poo bags on them at all times for the numbers of dogs they are exercising.



Impact on people

Dog walkers should be aware that some members of the public may feel scared and intimidated by, or dislike dogs. This can particularly be the case around children or if walking groups of dogs.

- Dog walkers should avoid areas that are heavily populated with children e.g. playgrounds. In some cases these areas will be covered by local bylaws preventing access for dogs, which must be followed at all times.
- Dog walkers must follow restrictions on the number of dogs to be walked, for example, in Royal Parks.
- Members of the public should be given right of way at all times and if walking with groups of dogs the dog walker should, wherever possible, avoid bottleneck points and narrow pathways.
- Dog walkers exercising groups of dogs should avoid meeting up with other dog walkers unless they are able to control each and every dog reliably and immediately.

Impact on other animals

Dog walking will be prohibited in certain locations dependent on local bylaws. These might be at certain times of year if this relates to wildlife or tourism.

- Dogs must not be allowed to frighten, threaten or interfere with wildlife.

Dogs must be kept on leads in this environment but could be released in some emergency situations if chased by cattle as dropping the lead may help dogs and walkers to get away.

Professional Conduct – ensuring walkers are skilled, knowledgeable and competent





Complying with legislation

Professional dog walkers should have the safety, comfort, welfare and security of dogs above commercial interest at all times. Dog walkers should be professional and courteous to members of the public, set good examples of animal welfare and dog walking and comply with the relevant legislation.

As dog walkers are in charge of the dog, they could be found liable for an accident or injury occurring or being caused by the dog whilst in their care. This could result in civil and criminal proceedings by those affected.

- All professional dog walkers should have adequate third party liability insurance, and wherever possible insurance that covers the dog in the walker's custody. Whether the insurance needs to also cover emergency veterinary fees depends on the prior written agreement between the dog walker and dog owner regarding whose responsibility it is to cover veterinary fees in an emergency.
- If a dog under the care of a dog walker is involved in an incident with another dog then the dog walker needs to fully document the incident and inform the owner.

National and local council regulations vary significantly and dog walkers should contact the local council for advice prior to undertaking such activities to ensure they comply with the law.

- Dog walkers must have licences if required by local councils and/or follow local council codes of conduct if present.
- Dog walkers must only walk up to the number of dogs covered by their insurance policy and allowed by the local council authority.
- Dog walkers must keep dogs on a lead in designated areas.
- Dogs must be on a lead on public highways even if the owner has granted permission for the dog to be allowed off lead when in the care of the walker.
- Dog walkers must put dogs on a lead when asked to do so by an authorised officer – this will vary depending on local council bylaws.

It is a legal requirement to have a dog microchipped (unless it has an exemption certificate issued by a veterinary surgeon) and wear a collar and tag with the owner's name and address present, to aid identification if the dog is lost.

- All dogs walked must wear a collar and tag with the dog's owner's name and address. It is recommended this contains the walker's contact details alongside the owner's details.
- The dog walker should check that the dogs in their care are microchipped by checking relevant paperwork and that there is an exemption certificate issued by a veterinary surgeon if not.
- If a dog gets lost, dog walkers should contact the dog's owner and the dog warden immediately.
- Dog walkers should ensure dogs are never left unattended in public places.

Training of Dog Walkers

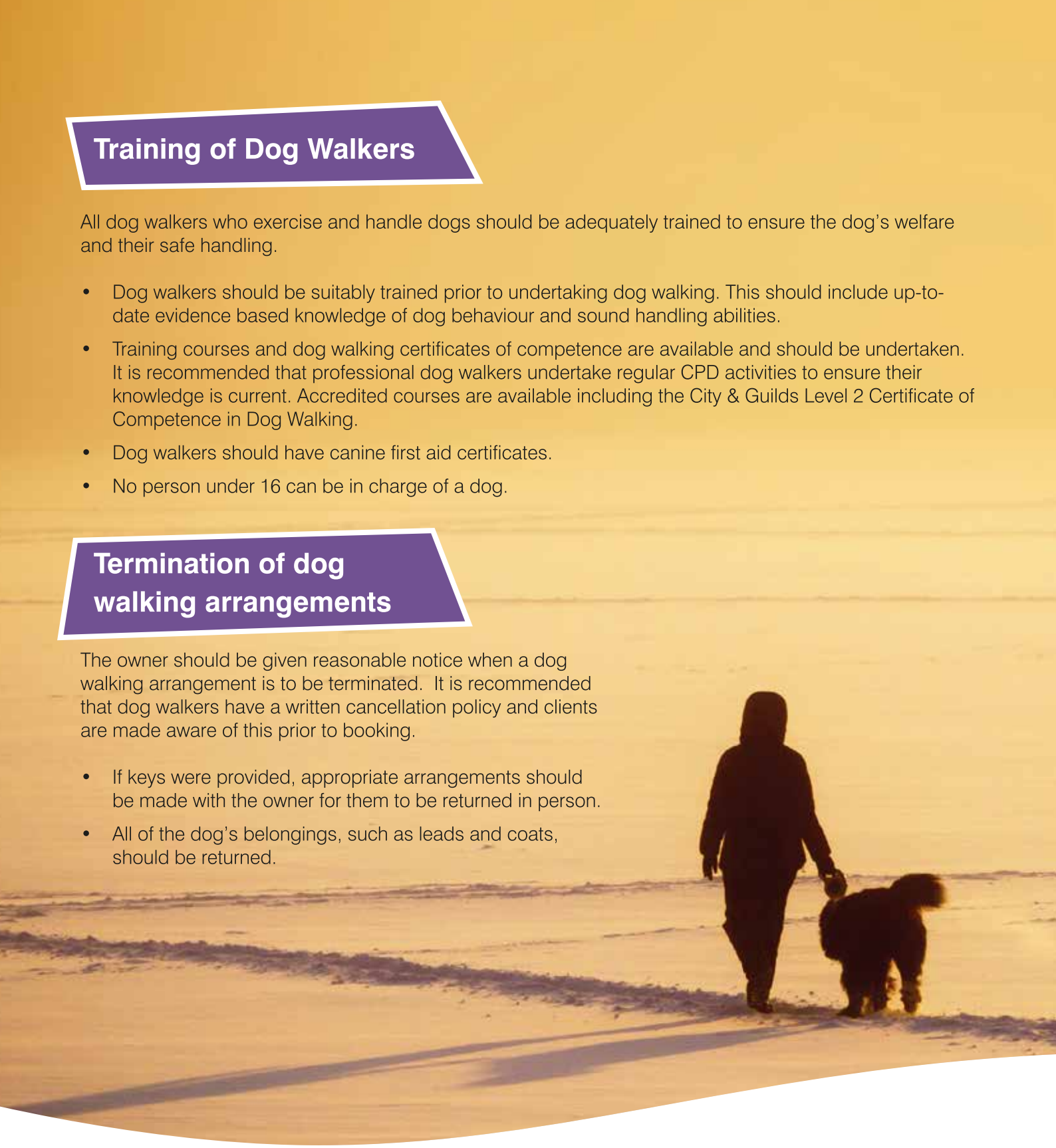
All dog walkers who exercise and handle dogs should be adequately trained to ensure the dog's welfare and their safe handling.

- Dog walkers should be suitably trained prior to undertaking dog walking. This should include up-to-date evidence based knowledge of dog behaviour and sound handling abilities.
- Training courses and dog walking certificates of competence are available and should be undertaken. It is recommended that professional dog walkers undertake regular CPD activities to ensure their knowledge is current. Accredited courses are available including the City & Guilds Level 2 Certificate of Competence in Dog Walking.
- Dog walkers should have canine first aid certificates.
- No person under 16 can be in charge of a dog.

Termination of dog walking arrangements

The owner should be given reasonable notice when a dog walking arrangement is to be terminated. It is recommended that dog walkers have a written cancellation policy and clients are made aware of this prior to booking.

- If keys were provided, appropriate arrangements should be made with the owner for them to be returned in person.
- All of the dog's belongings, such as leads and coats, should be returned.



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