

# DOG PARK ETIQUETTE & SAFETY

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*By following common sense guidelines, a dog park has the potential to create healthier and happier dogs, bring you and your dog closer together and introduce you to people who share your sense of the human-canine bond.*

## ADVANTAGES TO DOG PARK USE

- May be a good opportunity to socialize with other dogs
- Dogs can learn necessary behavioral lessons from other dogs
- Stimuli & exercise can send your dog home tired & happy
- Meeting other people who appreciate your bond with your pet

## POTENTIAL DISADVANTAGES TO DOG PARK USE

- One negative experience can create future behavioral issues.
- Using a dog park too frequently can create a dog that requires too much stimuli in order to “be tired” – you don’t want to build that kind of tolerance in your dog.
- Stressful events that may occur in dog parks can create a strong chemical change in your dog’s brain. Chemical changes can & do interfere with a dog’s ability to process & cope with novel stimuli outside of a park environment.

## BASIC GUIDELINES

- Dogs under 16 weeks & older dogs not current on vaccinations should not come into the dog park area, nor should dogs who may be feeling ill.
- Any dog with a history of aggression towards other dogs should not come into the dog park area.
- If the park seems overcrowded, it probably is! Overcrowding stresses the animals & may ultimately lead to altercations. You & your dog will both be happier if you come back after the crowd has thinned out. *The bigger the park, the better.*
- Always use your best judgment & instincts when it comes to other dogs. If you don’t feel comfortable with another dog in the park, leave. *Do not allow another owner to talk you into believing their dog is not a threat.*
- Consider infrequent use, such as 1-2 visits per week, lasting no more than 30 minutes at a time. Dogs, like kids, can behave inappropriately after extended playtime.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DOGS

- Dogs entering the park should have a reliable recall (coming when called).
- Dogs at the park should have no history of dog-to-dog or dog-to-human aggression.
- Wear a regular collar, as choker-style collars can get caught during play & cause injury.
- In pursuit of setting everyone up for successful use of the park, your dog should be spayed or neutered.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMANS

- Treats are not a great idea for the park - some dogs don't share very well.
- Always have poop bags.
- Have a cell phone in case of emergency.
- Consider taking a class or reading up to best educate yourself about canine language & communication.
- Not everyone may agree with your ideas on dog training & behavior. Be prepared to agree to disagree!

## IF THERE IS AN ALTERCATION...

- Keep in mind that most dog arguments are simply ritualized vocalization &/or physical maneuvering. In most cases, dogs are not trying to hurt each other, but vying for things like status or position closest to a ball.
- Do not get in between fighting dogs, as this is how most injuries occur.
- Make a series of deep, loud sounds in an attempt to verbally distract the dogs.
- If you have water or a jacket, try to distract the dogs by actually throwing those items at the dogs.
- If the above suggestions do not separate the dogs, follow these instructions:
  - 1 Get behind your dog.
  - 2 Keeping your face as far away as possible, place both hands under the back hips of your dog, near the genital area & gently pull upwards - typically this will work to distract your dog enough so that the altercation will cease.

## OTHER POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

- If your dog does not enjoy the style of play that occurs at dog parks, take them hiking or on long walks where you might run into other dogs in a friendly, non-confrontational way.
- Not all dogs want to play with other dogs in a chaotic environment. Shy or fearful dogs may look like they are coping okay, but in fact, may just be shutting down in order to stay out of trouble.
- Overuse of off-leash dog parks can make it more difficult for you to control your dog on a short lead when you encounter dogs on your walks. If you are seeing this, talk to a trainer who uses scientific, positive & dog-friendly training methods.
- In hot weather, dogs can overheat very quickly. Stay out of high-energy environments when the temps are high!