



## Dog Park Guidelines

### Benefits

- Provides an opportunity for fun and exercise
- Play with other dogs helps to teach and maintain bite inhibition
- Can help to teach dogs how to control frustration and excitement
- Good social skills give you flexibility to take your dog anywhere

### Drawbacks

- Dog play can become the most important part of your dog's life, making training difficult
- Dogs can learn poor meeting/greeting habits which are not appropriate when on leash and can make leash-walking around other dogs difficult
- A dog park full of adolescent dogs is like Spring Break for dogs – the adolescents learn to make their own rules about appropriate behavior
- If left to play without intervention, some dogs learn to ignore their handlers in the presence of other dogs
- Frightening or traumatic experiences can increase fearful or aggressive behavior

### How to keep your dog safe and happy at the dog park

1. **ALWAYS WATCH YOUR DOG** – You are responsible for making sure that your dog enjoys her time at the park and behaves in a way that allows other dogs to enjoy themselves.
2. **Recognize appropriate play** – During play it is normal and appropriate for dogs and puppies to:
  - Bark
  - Wrestle
  - Mouth
  - Bow
  - Mount (may not be tolerated by all dogs and the dog should dismount if asked)
  - Yelp (the other dog should immediately back off)
  - Growl
  - Chase
  - Paw
  - Butt swing
3. **Recognize inappropriate play** – Inappropriate play involves:
  - More than one dog picking on another (pack behavior)
  - Bullying (dogs do not trade roles during play)
  - Chasing without letting the other dog rest
  - Cornering or crowding another dog (especially when done by a pack)
  - Body-slammings
4. **Teach your dog to disengage from play and pay attention to commands for:**
  - Safety – you can intervene when play gets too rough or your dog becomes over-excited
  - Control – your dog will learn that obeying you, even in the presence of other dogs, will be rewarding, and your dog will learn to obey despite many distractions

## **5. Know when to stay and when to leave**

- Always watch the dogs in the park before you enter. If there are large numbers of unfamiliar dogs or a group of dogs bullying the current park goers, take a walk and come back when the park is less busy.
- Size does matter. Enter the park only when size and age appropriate dogs are present.
- If your dog is overexcited before entering, it can result in inappropriate behavior. Teach your dog to focus and be calm before entering by using obedience commands and tricks.
- Be aware that the presence of toys and food can create conflicts between dogs. Use toys and food to work with your dog only in the presence of dogs you know who will not fight over access to these resources.
- When a new dog enters the park, call your dog to you and give the new dog a chance to acclimate. Allow the new dog to meet one on one with each dog in the park rather than allowing a gang to greet the newcomer at the gate. This gang behavior can create tension and spark conflict.
- Tired dogs do not react appropriately to difficult situations. Take your dog home before it gets exhausted.
- You should leave or take a break at the side of the park if your dog begins to bully another dog by:
  - Charging at it
  - Snarling, lunging, snapping
  - Not letting it get up or get away
  - Body-slammng it
- You should leave or take a break at the side of the park if your dog shows signs of stress such as:
  - Cowering, hiding or trying to leave
  - Lowering its head
  - Putting its ears back
  - Yawning
  - Raising its hackles (can mean nervousness, excitement or aggression)

## **6. Recognize potential conflict zones**

- The presence of toys and food can create conflicts between dogs. Use toys and food to work with your dog only in the presence of dogs you know who will not fight over access to these resources.
- When a new dog enters the park, call your dog to you and give the new dog a chance to acclimate. Allow the new dog to meet one on one with each dog in the park rather than allowing a gang to greet the newcomer at the gate. Such gang behavior can create tension and spark conflict.

## **7. Understand what to do when corrections, squabbles and fights happen**

- If a dog corrects another dog for rude behavior and the correction is quick, fair, does no harm and ends as soon as the offending dog backs off, no intervention is needed.
- Sudden, quick disagreements with lots of noise that end in a matter of seconds are normal and it is probably safe to allow the dogs to remain in the park if neither shows any inclination to continue the argument.
- Interrupt any situation that seems to be escalating.
  - Use your voice in a calm, commanding way to stop the fight. Screaming simply increases the arousal of the dogs involved.
  - Do NOT stick your hands into the middle of a dog fight to separate dogs. If physical intervention is needed, try to grab the back legs of your dog and “wheel-barrow” it until it calms down. Fighting dogs will often strike at anything that moves near their face and human hands are far more delicate than most areas where one dog will bite another.
  - Do not allow additional dogs to jump into the fight. If you see or hear a squabble between other dogs, get your dog immediately and take it away from the area.
  - Do not panic. It will not help the dogs. Remember that as a general rule, the louder the fight, the more bluff and bluster is involved and the less damage. Most dog fights between similar size dogs do not result in serious injury.
- Once a fight occurs, the adrenaline levels of the dogs involved, and many of those who witnessed the fight, will be raised for several hours. It is wise to take these dogs out of the park and exercise them elsewhere to avoid the potential of another fight.

## **8. Recognize that the dog park is not appropriate for all dogs** – If your dog acts fearful, aggressive or bullies other dogs, seek professional help before continuing to take your dog to the park.