

DOG PARK ETIQUETTE AND SAFETY TIPS

1. Have realistic expectations about your dog's suitability for going to the dog park. If he isn't polite or friendly with others, get help to change his behavior before you take him to a dog park. Dog parks are not a place to rehabilitate fearful or aggressive dogs or those that just don't know how to play well with others.
2. Before you take your dog into the off leash dog park, spend a few minutes watching the other dogs and how they are playing and interacting with others. If the dogs seem to be too rough in their play or are intimidating other dogs, come back some other time.
3. If your dog has never been around other dogs before – don't go to the dog park until he's had a chance to be around other dogs in other situations so you have a better idea of how he reacts to other dogs.
4. If you aren't sure how your dog will behave, don't be ashamed or embarrassed to muzzle your dog the first few times he comes to the dog park. Better safe than sorry.
5. Introduce your dogs to other dogs gradually – allow your dog to greet other dogs while he's still in the separate entry area, or let your dog sniff around the fenced boundary.
6. Be careful entering the dog park gate. Other dogs tend to crowd around to greet an arriving dog. This jostling and crowding can be quite intimidating to many dogs and may result in a skirmish, or worse.
7. Do not bring your small children or babies in strollers into the dog park. Dogs and children can easily frighten one another and bad things can happen to either of them in the blink of an eye.
8. Supervise your dog. This is not the time for you to be distracted talking with other owners or burying yourself in a book or phone. You must be monitoring your dog's activities to be sure they aren't behaving badly and other dogs are not behaving badly toward them. This is another reason not to take young children –you can't adequately supervise both dogs and kids at the same time.
9. Be particularly watchful of small dogs around big dogs. Don't let big dogs frighten or threaten small dogs. Aggression between big and small dogs is especially likely to result in serious or fatal injuries to the small dog.
10. Don't bring any toys to the park your dog is not willing to share or loose. It's best if you don't bring any toys as other dogs might get possessive of it and that could cause an issue.
11. While tidbits/treats can be a great way to reward good behavior, you cannot bring treats or food into the dog park.
12. Pick up after your dog! You don't want to step in another dog's poop any more than someone else wants to step in your dog's mess. Help others realize the rules by asking them to please pick up after their dog as well. Diseases and illnesses can be spread from the lack of picking up poop. It's our park, let's keep it clean.

13. Avoid grabbing your dog's collar when your dog is playing or interacting with other dogs. Such tugging can sometimes trigger threats and aggression toward nearby dogs. If you need to remove the dog from a situation, use your leash.
14. If your dog seems to be fearful or is being "bullied" by other dogs, don't let her stay, thinking she will "get over it", that she will learn to "stand up for herself". Chances are greater her behavior will get worse.
15. Don't let other dogs threaten or scare your dog. If they won't leave, then remove your dog and call animal control.
16. If your dog is being a bully, being threatening or aggressive, or just seems to be overly excited, remove him from the park, either temporarily or permanently. It is not fair to put other dogs at risk. Make the safety of other dogs and people as high a priority as the safety of your own.
17. Know how to break up a dog fight. Direct Stop™, a harmless but effective citronella spray or a small hand-held air horn are your best bets. Don't scream and yell at your dog, or try to pull her off by the collar, or get in the middle of the fight as this only adds to the general arousal and greatly increases either the dogs' or your chances of injury. Most dog fights last a few seconds to show dominance. If fighting continues, pull both dogs away by the hind legs at the same time.
18. Always take your cell phone and have the phone number of the local animal control agency. Call animal control or the local police and report any aggressive person or dog that won't leave the dog park. These individuals are dangerous to people and dogs.
19. Be knowledgeable about dog body postures, communication signals and social behavior. You should be able to recognize stress, tension, fear, play, threats and aggression. Know the difference between play (which can be very active and sound violent) and real threats. Know when to intervene and when to stay out of an interaction among dogs. If you feel uninformed about canine behavior, learn more before bringing your dog to the park.
20. Recognize that by taking your dog to a dog park, you are accepting a degree of risk that your dog may be injured or may injure another dog. Don't be naïve and think that a dog park is a safe place for your dog to be around other dogs. This may not always be the case.