

Tips on Dog Park Etiquette  
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Dog parks continue to grow in popularity and are becoming more common in our communities. They provide an ideal place for dogs to exercise and socialize with other dogs. If you are fortunate to have a local dog park nearby, knowing and following some basic rules of dog park etiquette will provide the greatest opportunity for a safe and positive experience for you and your pet. Rules are usually posted near the entrance to the park and while specific rules will vary from park to park, there are some basic guidelines which are common to most dog parks. Following the rules along with being considerate and respectful of other users of the park will help to ensure that everyone enjoys their visit. Below are some basic guidelines to be aware of before taking your dog to your local dog park.

- Dogs known to be aggressive towards other dogs or people should never be brought to a dog park.
- All dogs should be licensed and up to date on all vaccinations and parasite control.
- Puppies under 4 months of age should not be brought to the park. This is for their safety. Until they have had all their vaccinations, puppies are at risk of picking up diseases.
- Females in heat should never be brought to the park.
- Dogs should always be supervised and never left unattended. Always know where your dog is and be responsible for his behavior towards other dogs and people in the park.
- Pet owners are responsible for cleaning up after their own dogs.
- For their safety, babies and toddlers should not be allowed in the park. Some dog parks designate a specific age allowable for older children. In this case, children should be well behaved and supervised by an adult.
- Choke, prong, or shock collars should be removed from dogs while in the park due to the danger of dogs becoming entangled or injured during play. Quick release collars are recommended.
- Leashes should be removed upon entering the park. A leashed dog can feel vulnerable when around other dogs that are off-leash and may respond with aggression if he/she feels threatened.

Visiting a dog park for the first time without your dog is a good idea and will give you the opportunity to become familiar with the features of the park, go over the rules and allow you to observe how other pet owners manage and interact with their dogs. Make sure the park is securely enclosed and is large enough for several dogs to run around and play safely and comfortably. Note whether the park has bags available for cleaning up after your dog or if you will need to bring your own. Check to see if there is drinking water available and if there are any shaded areas for relief from the sun in the warmer months. Some

parks have an area for smaller dogs to play safely separated from larger dogs. If you have a smaller breed, this might be something to look for especially if your dog is intimidated by larger dogs. Being prepared before you go will provide a better first time experience.

Although most dogs enjoy being off-leash and allowed to run freely and play with other dogs, dog parks are not a good fit for every dog. A dog which lacks basic obedience commands, especially recall skills is not a good dog park candidate. Wait until your dog has learned to come when called and to obey simple commands before visiting the dog park for her safety as well as the safety of other dogs she interacts with. Other dogs that are poor dog park candidates are those which are naturally shy or fearful of other dogs or dogs that become overwhelmed or overstimulated easily in this type of environment. If these are characteristics of your dog, a trip to the dog park may wind up being more stressful than enjoyable. In these cases, consider taking your dog when the park is least crowded, which is usually early on a weekday morning instead of on a busy weekend or after work during the week.

A bad experience at a dog park is usually the result of pet owners that are not paying attention to their dogs or their failure to comply to the rules of the park. Going to a park in which the rules are not followed or enforced puts both you and your dog at risk. If you find that your dog is not playing well with other dogs or is being annoying to other dogs or humans, redirect his attention to something else. If this is unsuccessful, you need to know when to leave the park if your dog's behavior cannot be controlled. Everyone has a bad day occasionally, and the same is true for dogs! Using good common sense will help to reduce the chance of a negative experience for you and your dog.

Dog parks are wonderful additions to our communities. Aside from the obvious health benefits for your dog, they also benefit you as a pet owner by bringing together people with a common interest...their dogs! This allows for new friendships and exchanging ideas which creates stronger communities. When good dog park etiquette is followed and owners are attentive to their dogs and respectful of others, dog parks can provide an enjoyable place for you and your pet to have fun, burn off some energy and in the long run, improve the quality of life for you both.