

SAFETY TIPS:

APPROACHING THE DOG PARK

1. Keep dogs on leash until they are inside the gate.
2. Make sure the first gate is closed BEFORE entering the second gate. If the outer gate is open, there is always a chance that a dog can run out of the park and into the street.
3. Users already inside the park should call their dogs away from the gate until the new arrivals have entered. It's difficult for a new arrival to enter the park if a wall of dogs is blocking the gate. Dogs are territorial creatures, and the boundaries of a territory are flashpoints for aggression. Once the dog is inside the territory, the chances for conflict are much less.
4. Unleash your dog as quickly as possible after entering the park. A dog often feels vulnerable being on leash while other dogs around it are off leash. The leashed dog knows that it cannot maneuver freely and cannot get away if it wants to. This sense of vulnerability may lead to aggression. Many users choose to unleash their dog in the "vestibule" area-after entering and closing the outer gate, but before opening the inner gate.
5. Remove metal collars. This includes prong or "pinch" collars, choke chains, and spike collars. Chain collars can become caught on the fence. There is also the risk of other dogs breaking their teeth on the collar, especially if engaging in mouthy play.

INSIDE THE DOG PARK

1. Know your dog's play style. Some dogs like a very rough-and-tumble style of play, with lots of growling, grabbing, tackling, and wrestling. Some dogs have a daintier style, with bowing and chasing but not much physical contact. Some dogs like to herd other dogs, and may bark or nip at the other dogs. The important thing is to know what is normal for your dog, and what the warning signs are that your dog may be getting over-stimulated and may be in danger of crossing the line into aggression. It's also important to be sensitive to the other dogs with whom your dog is playing. You should always watch your dog closely and be prepared to intervene if the interaction seems to be getting out of hand or becoming too uncomfortable for a particular dog. If your dog seems to be "pestering" another dog who seems to be growing stressed or annoyed, intervene and direct your dog's attention elsewhere.
2. Understand canine communication. Dogs that enjoy rough play may growl and snap as part of that play. Dogs may also snarl and/or snap to "set their limits" with other dogs-for example, to let another dog know that it is being too rough or too pushy.

Dogs are programmed to be part of a pack, with some dogs being higher in the pack hierarchy (dominant) and others being lower in the hierarchy (submissive). Dogs have various ways by which they communicate their dominance to other dogs. This may include a stiff-legged posture with the head held up and back; raising the hackles on the back; raising the tail; or laying the head across another dog's shoulders or back. If you see two dogs exchanging dominant gestures with each other, watch out-you may have a fight brewing.

Mounting ("humping") is often a way by which one dog expresses dominance over another. Do not allow your dog to mount another dog, as this behavior is very likely to lead to a fight. Even if your dog means no harm, the other dog is very likely to take offense.

3. Respond promptly to aggressive behavior. Deciding what constitutes aggressive behavior is sometimes a matter of judgment. It's important to know your dog and to know what is normal and safe for your dog.

Dogs displaying significant aggression toward other dogs, or any aggression toward humans, must IMMEDIATELY be leashed and removed from the park for the day. This is not only for the safety of other park users-it can also help with the dog's own education. A dog soon realizes that aggressive behavior earns it a one-way ticket out of the park-and many dogs quickly learn to mind their manners.

You may find that your dog gets along better with certain dogs, or with certain types of dogs, than with others, and you may want to avoid entering the park when there are dogs with whom your dog has a problem.

A dog that repeatedly displays aggressive behavior with a variety of dogs is not a good dog park candidate and should stop coming to the park.

It is strongly recommended that dogs be spayed or neutered before coming to the dog park. Unneutered males in particular are much more likely to get into fights with other male dogs.

BREAKING UP A DOG FIGHT

1. The best way to deal with a fight is to not allow it to happen in the first place. Know your dog, understand canine communication, monitor situations carefully, and be prepared to intervene before stress, over-stimulation, or aggression, escalate into a full-fledged fight. If, despite your efforts, a fight does break out, here are some guidelines to follow:
2. Both owners MUST get control of their dogs immediately. If one owner gets control of his or her dog but the other owner does not, this creates a very dangerous situation for the first dog and owner.
3. Grab the dogs from the BACK-grab either the tail or the hind legs. If a dog is involved in a fight, you should not grab the collar or put your hands anywhere near the dog's head. A dog that is fighting is in a state of frenzy and is not aware of what it is doing. It may reflexively lash out and bite at anything that comes near its head. The safest approach is to grab the dog's tail. If the dog has no tail, grab the hind legs. Both owners should grab their dogs and pull them away from each other at the same time. Then each dog should be leashed and IMMEDIATELY removed from the park.
4. Other users should get hold of their own dogs. The sight of a fight breaking out sometimes incites other dogs to get involved.
5. Do NOT stick your hands into a fight between other people's dogs. If you reach into the middle of a dog fight, you are likely to get bitten. You may mean to be helpful, but if you get bitten by someone else's dog, that dog may end up in trouble with the legal authorities. Let the owners control their own dogs.