



# Dog Park Safety Tips



*Dog Parks can be a great way to socialise your dog, but can also be unsafe if proper precautions aren't taken. The following tips are to help you keep your dog safe and happy at the park.*

**KNOW YOUR DOG.** Not all dogs enjoy meeting new dogs. Don't overwhelm your dog by letting them meet too many dogs at once. If your dog has not interacted regularly with other dogs, perform a test run in a controlled environment to find out how they will react to unfamiliar dogs.

**KEEP YOUR DOG HEALTHY.** Be sure your dog isn't vulnerable to picking up infections from other dogs by keeping them up-to-date on their vaccinations and worming medications.

**OBSERVE.** Consider visiting the park without your dog for the first time to familiarise yourself with the park and the dogs that play there. Before bringing your dog inside the park, spend a few minutes watching the other dogs and how they interact before you decide to allow your dog inside.

**START OUT SLOW.** The first few visits to the dog park should be short, no longer than 15 minutes. Slowly increase the length of your stays as your dog becomes more comfortable with the dog park atmosphere.

**CHOOSE A TIME THAT IS LESS BUSY** for your first few visits to the park. Weekday evenings are peak, high-traffic times at dog parks, and weekends and holidays tend to be busy all day long.

**CLOSELY SUPERVISE YOUR DOG.** Don't get distracted while talking to other owners. Keep an eye on your dog at all times to make sure their interactions with other dogs are safe. Watch their body language to help you avoid any trouble before it begins. Watching their actions also enables you to quickly clean up after your pet, which is both courteous and appreciated.

**LET YOUR DOG OFF THE LEAD AS SOON AS YOU ENTER UNLEASHED AREAS.** Mixing leashed and unleashed dogs can create a hostile situation. A leashed dog cannot make the choice his natural instinct tells him of "fight or flight" -if he cannot take flight, he may have to fight.

**POTENTIAL HAZARDS.** Be aware of potential hazards that may be in the park, such as toxic chemicals, garbage or noxious plants. Be sure to wash any chemicals, such as fertiliser or pesticides off of your dog's feet and legs to ensure they aren't licked and ingested.

**LEAVE CHILDREN AT HOME.** Don't bring children with you to the dog park. You will not safely be able to watch your kids and your dog at the same time. Dogs and children both frighten and excite easily-and react differently-creating a dangerous atmosphere.

**LEAVE SMALL PUPPIES AT HOME.** Puppies less than four months old aren't fully immunised yet and are at higher risk for contracting diseases. They are also very vulnerable to being traumatised by another dog's aggressive behaviour.

**DO NOT BRING TOYS OR FOOD.** Most parks are already littered with balls and toys that other people have brought. Rewarding your dog with treats or giving him toys in front of other dogs can create jealousy and aggression.

**BODY LANGUAGE.** Educate yourself about dog body language and communication signals so you can tell the difference between fear, play and anger. Your local Bark Busters trainer can help you learn to "read" your dog's body language.

**KNOW WHEN TO LEAVE.** You should remove your dog from the park if they: are being threatened or bullied and seems fearful; begins to display aggressive behaviour by becoming overexcited or threatening toward other dogs; is panting heavily; or seems overly tired. Keep your dog's welfare a top priority.

**DO NOT PHYSICALLY INTERVENE IN A DOG FIGHT.** *Never* reach in to break up fighting dogs. Squirt the dogs in the face with a water bottle or try to distract them by throwing something near them, but never physically intervene.

**PREVENT INJURIES.** Be aware of the signs of a possible dog fight before it might happen. If your dog injures a person or dog, give your name and phone number to the injured party. Report to law enforcement authorities any handlers who refuse to take liability for damages/injuries and who are endangering the safety of others.

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