



# 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 him 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 he 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 him up to date on his 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 his interactions with other dogs are safe. Watch his body language to help you avoid any trouble before it begins. Watching his actions also enables you to quickly clean up after your pet, which is both courteous and appreciated.

**LET YOUR DOG OF LEAD AS SOON AS YOU ENTER APPROVED AREAS.** Mixing dogs on lead and off lead can create a hostile situation. A dog on lead cannot make the choice his natural instinct tells him of "fight or flight" - If he cannot take flight so 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 fertilizer 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 he: is 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 you will get bitten by your dog or the other dog. It is better 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 the Police and your local authority any owners who refuse to take liability for damages/injuries and who are endangering the safety of others.

