

The Unwritten Rules of the Dog Park

Dog parks are a great community resource. Many big cities offer this amenity, and they are a major perk to dog owners. While they are meant to be a harmonious piece of nature tucked away in the hustle and bustle of the city, sometimes us humans can make them even less peaceful than their chaotic surroundings. Any time you venture to a dog park, whether new or an old favorite, it is a good idea to read over the rules posted on the fence. And while adhering to those rules are a good start, they don't cover everything it takes to be a decent human at a dog park. We are here to help you fill in the gap and make sure you are the best pet parent possible.

The Basics. There are a few things we'll start with. These may even be posted in the main rules of the park, but they are worth repeating. First, before you even plan to head to the park be sure your dog is not sick and is fully vaccinated. This is so important. Your dog will be interacting with a lot of other dogs, and if you are overdue for a vaccine, you could be putting your dog and all the other dogs at risk of falling ill. If your dog is sick or not up to date, please do the decent thing and keep them home.

We can't say this one loud enough for the people in the back: PICK UP AFTER YOUR DOG. We get it, it's gross. No one likes picking up a warm pile of dog doo. But if your dog does his business, please just pick it up and toss it in one of the designated bins. No one can enjoy the park if it is covered in feces, and we're counting on everyone to do their part to keep it poo-free.

Safety Precautions. We are in a park with a lot of hyper dogs, and unsafe things can happen. Here are a few basic safety considerations to keep in mind to help mitigate some of the potential problems.

Train your dog in recall. This is helpful for countless reasons. If your dog is venturing off too far, annoying another dog, climbing on another human or even just trying to play with a toy they shouldn't be, recall can instantly remedy this. It's great training to have and comes in handy in more situations than you may think.

Also, if your dog is pregnant or in heat do NOT head to the park. If she is in heat, all the other dogs will know - they were designed to know - and instincts will kick in. Not only could you end up with a prego pup, but it could cause fights amongst the other dogs and it is just a no bueno situation. Keep her home and safe.

Don't bring small children with you. Toddlers and puppies may seem like a perfect combo. But toddlers and 30 playful dogs, not so much. If you have small children that have to come to the park with you, we strongly recommend having them safely secured in a stroller or outside the perimeter of the park. But the safest place for small children is just not at the park altogether.

Small dogs can be at risk. If you are an owner of an adorably tiny dog you will need to take extra precautions. Some parks have small dog areas, separating them entirely from the larger dogs and that's great. If your local park does not, you will need to consider whether or not it is safe for your tiny pup to go. This is because we don't want your little pup to get stepped on,

kicked, or pushed around in any way. While a majority of the bigger dogs at the park don't mean to cause harm, size is always a factor to keep in mind.

Polite Considerations. The park should be a fun place to be for both humans and pets. That means being respectful of both our two-legged and four-legged compatriots. Here are some simple ways we can respect those we share the park with.

Don't spend the entire time on the phone or talking with a friend. We know it's tempting to spend your downtime on a bench, scrolling through social media, or chatting it up with a fellow dog owner. But your responsibility is to watch your pup. Please do so. While you're watching your dog, make sure they are using their best doggie manners. Do not let them take toys from another dog, mount another dog, rough play with another dog, or in any way annoy another dog or human.

Leave your favorite dog toys at home. If you are worried about a toy being harmed or lost, do not bring it to the dog park. Tennis balls or toys are obviously a great way to play, but if the toy is special or your dog doesn't like to share, it's best to leave toys at home.

Be courteous of your fellow humans. If you want to pet a dog that is not your own, ask. The same goes for if you want your dog to play with their dog. People and pups are generally super friendly, and some of the best friendship can blossom at a dog park, but it is always best to err on the side of caution. It is possible the human or the dog may not want to interact with you, and you should always respect that.

Dog parks are a glorious oasis for dogs and their owners to retreat to when they need quality playtime. The humans and dogs who frequent these parks are often wonderfully interesting and fun individuals. Every so often, though, there is a bad seed that ruins the whole experience. Follow the above mentioned unwritten rules of the dog park to ensure you and/or your dog are never the bad seed.