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## **Dog Park Etiquette**

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**For many city pet owners, dog parks are a god send!** A way to exercise your athletic dog after you've been at work all day, socialize a new puppy, and even meet new friends (for you and your dog!). But a dog park can also be dangerous when we are not watching our dogs closely enough for signs of stress, anxiety, or overstimulation. This handout should serve as a guide on how you and your dog can have a positive experience while at the dog park!

### **First, Some Basic Guidelines:**

1. **Not all dogs are dog park dogs!** If your dog has a history of aggression towards any other dogs or humans, becomes stressed in a group of dogs, or guards things that are of high value to him (toys, sticks); he may not be the best candidate for dog park socialization.
2. **Keep it positive!** If your dog is unfamiliar with the dog park setting, make sure his first few times at the dog park are positive and fun! This may mean going at off-peak times (Monday-Friday between 10am-3pm or after 7:30pm on any day). Once you are sure that your dog can successfully handle the rigors of a dog park, you may want to introduce him at peak times.
3. **Be present at the dog park.** When you are at the park, always have your eyes on your dog! Watching for signs of stress or bullying, giving your dog time outs if they are becoming overstimulated, and knowing when to go home for the day all come from watching every move your dog makes at the park. Sure, you can still socialize with all of your new dog people friends, but remember to keep one eye on your pooch at all times!
4. **Mind your comings and goings!** Entering and exiting the dog park can be hot buttons for many dogs. Leashed dogs, when surrounded by loose dogs can feel threatened and vulnerable and may lash out. Practice proper entrance and exit techniques by utilizing our double-gate policy.
5. **Know when your dog has had enough.** You will notice through your dog's behavior and body language when it's time to go! If you see any signs that your dog is tired or has had enough for one day, be proactive and give your dog a time out by taking him for a quick walk around the block, or going home for the day and coming back the next day.
6. **Be Proactive!** Everyone here knows that their dog is pretty much the most wonderful one in the whole park. But even if your dog is not being the instigator, if you think that your dog is in danger of having a bad experience at the park, be proactive about the situation. Always talk to people respectfully, and know when it is better to just remove your dog from the situation before an accident happens.

## What's What at the Dog Park?

When at the dog park, it's important to understand basic canine body language. This simple chart will help you recognize what's ok and what might lead to trouble!

<b>Appropriate- You're Ok!</b>	<b>Calming Signals- Meant to Diffuse Tension, Recognize and React Appropriately.</b>	<b>Inappropriate or Rude- Time for a Time Out -or- Maybe Time to Go!</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Butt sniffing and loose tail and body language.</li><li>• Wide, circular tail wagging.</li><li>• Play Bows.</li><li>• Butt Bumps.</li><li>• Playful Vocalization.</li><li>• Brief, fair, and harmless disagreements or corrections.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Averting eye contact.</li><li>• Lip-licking, chewing.</li><li>• Submissive urination.</li><li>• Going Belly Up.</li><li>• Tail between the legs.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hard Stares and Face-Offs.</li><li>• One individual chasing, pinning, targeting, or not letting up on another dog.</li><li>• A group of dogs mobbing an individual.</li></ul>

**Aggression vs. Correction.** There are times when a dog will correct another dog for something he deems inappropriate. This is totally normal, nonaggressive, and is actually good for teaching young dogs important lessons about canine social structure and body language. Appropriate corrections generally escalate in severity and result in no harm being done to the correctee. If your dog is over-correcting, it may be time to give a time out.

- Stiff body posturing and pilo-erection or whale eye. (Hair on shoulders and butt stand up and you see the whites of eyes.)
- Loud woofs or snarks directed at an individual.
- Muzzle punching or lunging resulting in no harm being done to the correctee.
- Normally done once and the argument is over.

**When it's time to go!** An important part of being a member of the dog park is recognizing when it's time for your dog to end their dog park session for the day. If your dog is exhibiting any of the following behaviors, it may be time to leave the park and come back later:

- Stiff body posturing and pilo-erection (hair on shoulders and butt standing straight up).
- Repeated correcting of other dogs, sometimes over very benign instances.
- Targeting, bullying, or stalking individual dogs.
- Fearfulness which doesn't subside.
- Prey Drive.

**How to Break Up a Dog Fight:** Dog fights happen! It's important when in a dog park to keep your cool if a fight breaks out so as not to escalate the situation!

- Collect loose dogs who are not part of the fight to prevent mobbing.
- Start by making a loud noise. I.e. clapping your hands or shouting 'No!' –or- Dumping a bucket of water on the fighting dogs.
- Do not grab dogs by collars or necks/faces to avoid a redirected bite.
- One person should grab each dog from the hips, pinching the loose skin between their belly and legs, and pull out of the fight, wheelbarrow-style. (Remember, 1 person per dog!)
- Remove fighting dogs from the park for the day.

