



DON'T TAKE YOUR PUPPY TO THE DOG PARK BEFORE READING THESE TIPS

Off-leash dog parks are an excellent way for your best pal to socialize, have fun and get some good quality run-around time. But before you go, it's wise to make sure your dog is willing and able to enjoy this unique environment without risking lousy behavior toward other dogs, owners, or even you.

Make sure vaccinations are up to date

Young pups often have a hard time hanging with bigger adult dogs as it is. But if they haven't had their rabies shots, they also run the risk of catching this awful disease. If you're planning on visiting a dog park, vaccinating for Bordetella - also known as kennel cough - might also be a good idea. Ask your veterinarian for their recommendation.



Is your dog's personality suited for off-leash play?

There are many reasons a dog may have an aggressive, fearful, or reactive personality - many shelter dogs learn these traits if their puppyhood was less than ideal. But regardless of the reason, these dogs are likely not suited for the dog park. Instead, start the socialization process with one or two calm, leashed, well-socialized dogs, and slowly work your way toward free play with more dogs. Putting them in over their head can lead to fights, bites, or worse. Oh, and if your dog isn't trained to come when called? The off-leash play probably isn't a good idea.

Make sure the park is age-appropriate

Socialization at the dog park is most beneficial for dogs under 2-3 years old. So if your dog doesn't show the desire to run with younger, higher-energy dogs, no worries! A quiet afternoon at home with your or a companion pet can be just as rewarding for both of you.

Keep kids in their park and dogs in theirs

Kids and canines are natural companions, but in the energy-charged world of the off-leash dog park, children aren't usually a healthy presence. Chasing, or wanting to be pursued, by a keyed-up pooch can often lead to play that's a little too aggressive for your little ones. So if your kids accompany you to the dog park, it's best to keep them entertained on the sidelines, or given a job like pre- or post-park treat administrator.



Find the right park

There are a few things you should look for in a dog park:

- 1.Plenty of space to run
- 2.Fully functioning fencing and gates
- 3.Clean-up stations
- 4.Water and shade - especially in warm climates
- 5.If you have a small dog, you may want to find a park with a designated small dog area
- 6.Rules - find ones you agree with and can live by
- 7.Other park goers - do the dogs at the park seem to get along well? Are there any notable aggressive dogs (or owners) that may present a problem? If so, steer clear.

Know the signs of healthy play

There are many common signs of a happy, playful dog that are great to know before you head to the park, and lots of commonly used games and activities that dogs love to do with each other. This article outlines a few of the most common ones.