

Are You & Your Dog Ready for the Dog Park?

Abbreviated from
PreventativeVet.com



Before Heading to the Dog Park

If your dog is friendly, healthy, and already socialized with other dogs and people, here are some other things to consider before visiting.

Solidify Your Dog's Basic Training

It's most important to make sure your dog is solid on name recognition, recall, and "leave it" before you head to the dog park. Take this into consideration with young or newly adopted dogs.

Scout out the Park

Upon each visit, observe the dogs and people before entering. If you see anything that gives you pause or just doesn't feel right, leave and come back another time.

Know your Dog's Play Style

If it appears that the dogs at the park may not mesh well with your dog's **play styles**, postpone your visit or leave if you're already inside. And remember, being a rough player doesn't make a dog "bad," but it does mean that all owners/guardians must carefully supervise interactions.

Exercise First

If you have a high-energy or excitable dog, it's best to take the edge off with play or a warm-up walk to diffuse excess energy and lower arousal. Dog parks are an exciting environment and the more aroused a dog's nervous system, the less their brain works. This can mean they lack inhibition, which can lead to miscommunication and worse.

Are Dog Parks Right for Your Dog?

While dog parks can provide exercise and social interaction for **SOME** dogs, many dogs don't enjoy or do well in a dog park environment.

Depending on the type of dog and type of owner/guardian, the dog park experience can vary wildly. Some dogs may have a longer adjustment period and some just aren't going to do well in the dog park.

If your dog has ever shown fear, aggression, social anxiety, resource guarding, or otherwise has shown they do not enjoy group play, it's best to avoid the dog park. There are many other ways to give your dog exercise and socialization.

Alternatives Activities that Provide Valuable Exercise and Socialization

- One-on-one or small group play at someone's home or dog daycare
- **Mental enrichment**
- Socialize your dog while on leash at stores or events that allow pets
- **Sniffari walks**, nature hikes, or long walks around town
- Dog sports such as agility, nose work, herding, dock diving, and flyball

Safety While at the Dog Park

Responsible owners/guardians are attentive and attempt to avoid or mitigate negative situations before they arise, even if this means ending or skipping the visit for that day.

Pay Attention and Leave, if Necessary

You should always keep an eye on your dog to ensure they and the other dogs are all playing nicely together. If there's a problem with one or more dogs, and their owners/guardians won't leave, then you should leave yourself. It's not worth a confrontation between dogs or people and is far safer for everyone.

Read Dogs' Body Language

Dog play can seem overwhelming to us humans. Dogs will wrestle, chase, make noises and exhibit play biting and teeth-jousting. Fortunately, dogs are very communicative and by watching their **body language** we can learn to tell the difference between play, aggression, and pestering.

Learning **how to manage dog play** can be very insightful as well.

Keep Moving

Your movement will help dogs keep moving as well, which reduces tension and helps prevent scuffles. Also, by staying in one place your dog may hover around you attracting other dogs to congregate. This can lead to a fight if your dog feels they need to be on guard or protect you or if a dog feels they can't find an easy way out of the crowd.

Know how to Break up a Dog Fight

Play itself is a highly arousing activity, and there can easily be a misunderstanding between dogs (for example: how hard they can bite and whether they are enjoying themselves or not). Without good communication skills and de-escalation practice (something young dogs lack), moments of disagreement can quickly turn into scuffles and altercations. Tips can be found, [here](#).

Don't Leave a Dog On Leash

Once inside the park, remove the leash so they can move freely and distance themselves if needed. Dogs on leash tend to act defensive more quickly than when off leash. However, all owners/guardians must be ready to use their leashes to gain control of their dog should an escalated situation arise.



In addition to these tips, Brian Bemis Family Dog Park owners/guardians must follow all park rules which can be found on site, in the Community Center, and online at sycparks.org.