

## A SUPPORTIVE CULTURE: WHAT THE HECK DOES THAT MEAN ANYWAY?

Those of you who have read the Dog Park's Etiquette Guide (and no doubt that's everyone) might have given some thought to the last paragraph. It states:

*A Supportive Culture: Help other members, especially new members, feel welcomed in the park. Always give suggestions with grace and kindness. Please adhere to the Code of Ethics for all SaddleBrooke Residents. The use of profane or abusive language will not be tolerated. If someone is trying to be helpful, accept the comments with grace. If you have a small dog in the large Dog Park and a member comes and suggest you leave, you should comply. They know their dog and are probably trying to avoid conflict. If you fill a swimming pool or water pan for your dog, it is your responsibility to empty it. We don't leave sitting water in AZ. It is a breeding ground for mosquitoes and diseases.*

All the points made in that statement are clear and easily understandable and probably not subject to much disagreement. Might the idea of a supportive culture entail more, however? Here are some thoughts on the subject --

**PUPPIES.** As we all know, lots and lots of our members have very young dogs. Puppies are fun and cute and a joy to watch when they're at play. And sometimes they can be a bit 'challenging' for their humans. Some patience is needed as members are working to train their puppies not to jump and nibble on human fingers, etc.

**RESCUED DOGS.** A great many of the dogs who belong to our dog park have heartbreaking stories and are so fortunate to have found loving homes in SaddleBrooke. They sometimes though also require our patience and close attention as they are becoming used a to new people, surroundings and dogs.

**RULES ARE IMPORTANT.** It gets tiring, I know, being reminded of the rules which we're all expected to follow as SBDP members and are available on our website and posted on the small and large parks' fences. They were all written for a reason though, and that is the safety of all our members and our dogs. Respecting the rules and adhering to them is crucial to the wellbeing of all who visit the SB dog park.

**Toys.** While you can bring your own dog toys like tennis balls or frisbees, make sure that no other dogs are trying to compete for them. Like children, dogs don't always want to share a favorite toy.

**PAUSE BEFORE YOU ENTER.** Dog parks generally have two entrance gates for a reason, and there is no reason to enter the 2<sup>nd</sup> quickly if there is a crowd on the other side. Enter the first gate with your dog on a leash, then pause to look around. If there are dogs swarming the gate, WAIT. Don't hesitate to alert the members inside if you feel the dogs at the entrance pose a threat. If they don't respond or say that their dog is not a problem, please continue to nicely ask that they remove their dog(s) from the gate. You can also enter the dog park without your dog to call out to the owner(s) and bring their attention to your kind request.

**PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR DOG.** Once inside, it's your job to keep an eye out for the dogs, not the people. The park is about socialization for our dogs, not us. Always know where your four-legged friend is and what they are doing. If you see trouble brewing, call them back right away. Some of the most common complaints heard from our members concern other members not picking up after their dogs and allowing their dogs to swarm the entrance gates.

**READ THE SIGNALS.** Signs your dog is anxious: it's tense, ears are back, tail is between its legs. While growls are common in play, snarling with lips curled back and snapping at a dog isn't. If you see some of these signs, you should attempt to redirect your dog's attention by calling it or making a loud noise.

**KNOWING WHEN TO LEAVE.** Most spats between our dogs are over quickly, and no harm is done. We must always remember though that a dog who demonstrates aggression should be removed immediately from the situation and/or from the park. The inappropriate behavior will continue if the dog is not taught that it's wrong. Don't forget to talk to the owner of a dog that yours may not "like" and apologize. A little apology and, an explanation if needed, goes a long way in creating a supportive culture.

**VOLUNTEERISM.** Being part of a supportive culture means that we care about the maintenance of the park and the safety of all the dogs, not just our own. Kindly remember that the dog park maintenance is supported all by volunteers. If you see a maintenance problem, or have a good idea to improve the park, consider volunteering to help fix it. Send an email to the current SBDP President.

We are so fortunate to have our wonderful facility in SaddleBrooke and also fortunate to have members who are committed to seeing that it's the best it can be. It's because of the efforts of all our members and volunteers that the park is so successful. Thank you for being part of what truly is a supportive culture within the dog park.

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