



Dog Park Etiquette

Do's & Don'ts for People and Pooches



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Dog Parks: love'em or hate'em, they are an essential for a lot of dog owners. Whether it's burning some energy or doing some socializing, dog parks can be a great way to bond with your pet. As a dog walker who spends an average of 20+hours a week at the dog park with my Goon Squad, I know how much fun dog parks can be, but I also know it's not always a picnic. Aggressive dogs, distracted pet parents and poop as far as the eye can see can ruin a trip to the park for you and your doggo. I've learned a thing or two during my tenure, and I'm happy to share them with you.



You Are Responsible for Your Dog

A lot of people show up to the park, let their dog off the leash, and then stare at their phone, chat with other people, or even have a nap (true story). Meanwhile, their dog is getting into all sorts of trouble, and other people at the park are left to deal with it. Even the best-behaved dog needs supervision, if only for their own safety. This doesn't mean constant, unwavering diligence - you're allowed to chat and check your phone, relax or take a load off - but you should always know where your dog is and what they're up to, and be prepared to step in. Things can get hectic at the park, so making sure you have a collar with a tag or your dog micro-chipped ensures that if you lose sight of them or they've decided they want to leave without you there is a way to reunite you with them if they are found.



Don't Ask for Trouble

Let's say it's the first time to the park for you and your pup, and you're a bit nervous. You decide to leave their leash on, because you think you'll have more control that way. Ignoring the fact that you and the dogs could easily get tangled up in the leash, a nervous dog that is leashed at the park is more likely to react aggressively. Better to slowly introduce them to the park off-leash, or socialize them in a more controlled environment before bringing them to the park. The same goes for picking up a dog that is small or nervous; the other dogs are immediately going to want to jump up and see what's going on, resulting in you getting knocked on your butt and your dog getting freaked out. Ensure you and your dog is confident before heading into the park and be ready to leave if it's not working out!



The Stinky Truth

Dogs poop, there's no getting around it, and nothing spoils a trip to the dog park faster than stepping in it. One of my furry clients loves to roll in dog poop, which makes for some stinky car rides home (cue

eye roll). This wouldn't happen, of course, if people picked up after their dogs. No one is perfect, and I've missed a poop or two in my time, but I would be a rich woman if I had a nickel for every time I saw someone intentionally leave their dog's poop behind. On that note, always bring extra bags for your pup, and any potential stragglers.



To Share or Not to Share

Your dog loves to play fetch. You bust out the 'Chuckit' and a tennis ball, then head to the park. You get one good throw in when another dog steals the ball and it's gone forever. What do you do? Unless your answer was 'accept it and move on', we need to talk. Most dogs don't understand personal property, so when you bring a ball or toy to the park, you and your dog better be prepared to share it with the class. This is especially important if your dog is possessive of their toys, in which case it's best just to leave it at home. Dogs are instinctive, and when you throw a ball they are just as likely as your dog to run after it. This doesn't make them bad dogs, just happy dogs having fun! If you do bring a ball or toy, be sure to take it with you when you leave (even if that means asking for it back from another dog!). Some dogs like to chew up or eat tennis balls and other toys, so to prevent this from happening, try to keep an eye on where they end up so you can take them when you leave.



Be Reasonable, and Don't Expect Perfection

Dogs will be dogs, and we can't expect perfect behavior all of the time. This means don't wear your best outfit to the park, and then get upset when the three-month old puppy jumps up on you. If you bring your stroller, expect dogs to be fascinated or terrified of it; either way, barking will likely ensue. Teach your kids how to interact with dogs before coming to the park, and please don't let them wear squeaky/ light up shoes (I had a dog steal one straight off a kid's foot).



Remember these quick tips for a successful day at the park:

1. Stay engaged and attentive - your phone can wait!
2. Know your dog - is the park right for them?
3. Clean up after your dog and yourself - leave the park clean for everyone
4. Always bring poop bags, extra if you've got 'em
5. Don't bring anything you or your dog aren't willing to share
6. Pack your patience - a level head is your best friend!
7. Finally, this one is important. Stay protected with a microchip and a collar with a tag!