



PIT BULLS & DOG PARKS

PITBULL ADVOCATES FOR COMPASSION & KINDNESS

Dog parks have fast become a popular (and to some, essential) part of dog ownership. While it may seem like a convenient way to socialize and exercise your dog, we strongly advise you NOT to take your Pit Bull to the dog park. Why?

Dog Parks Are Not the Best Idea for Socialization

Many owners, especially of new puppies, bring their dog to the dog park to socialize them with other dogs. While their intentions are well-meaning, the chaotic and often uncontrolled environment can be frightening and traumatic for a young puppy or unsocialized adult dog. Because other dogs are not leashed (and may even have bad manners) they tend to swarm and overwhelm the newest visitor.

From the moment your dog or puppy is brought into the dog park, she is surrounded by dogs clamoring to sniff, lick, shove, mount, bark at, or play with her. She may try to hide behind you or under a bench to protect herself. She may decide the safest thing for her to do is lay on her back in a submissive position in hopes the other dogs will stop bombarding her. She may even lash out and bite or attack a dog that is being rude or not giving her enough space. At this point, your dog has learned that the dog park is a very scary, overwhelming place and that other dogs can be unpleasant creatures! This can cause behavior issues in the future.

Most young puppies do great in social settings like dog parks. However, as your puppy matures her limits with other dogs may change. In the chaotic and confusing setting of a dog park she may decide to get into a fight over a toy -- something she will likely be blamed for whether she instigated it or not.

The best way to socialize your Pit Bull to other dogs is through controlled positive interactions with select, appropriate playmates that your dog has been introduced to slowly.

This way, you can create a positive atmosphere and closely monitor your dog's reactions. (Also read *Your Pit Bull: A Social Butterfly* on our website).

Dog Park Attendees Can Be Rude...

...both canines and humans! Some owners with little or inaccurate knowledge of dog behavior will allow their dog to persist in dominant behaviors toward other dogs, and will use phrases like, "Let them work it out" or "He's just establishing his status" to excuse their dog's poor manners.

Others see the dog park as a "babysitter" and are not even aware of what their dog is doing; they prefer to chit-chat with other owners while their dog plays unsupervised at the other end of the park. For some dogs, a trip to the dog park is the only exercise they get! They arrive frustrated and keyed-up -- not a good playmate for your dog! Even well-mannered dogs may pick up the rude behaviors of other dogs like humping, excessive mouthiness, and jumping.

From Puppies to Adulthood - Dog Tolerance

Socializing your dog is very important. However, as your bully matures from a puppy to an adult her

tolerance of other dogs may lessen. Most canines become less tolerant of other dogs as they mature. Some Pit Bulls will be social with dogs throughout their lives; some will not get along with any dogs once they mature (around 2-3 years old). Most dogs will be somewhere in between. If you have a Pit Bull that doesn't like other dogs, you can socialize him by taking him to a class where he can learn to accept the presence of other dogs on leash. (Check out our Classes page at <http://ourpack.org/classes> for more information).

With proper socialization, training, and (especially) management, your Pit Bull should never be involved in a dog fight. Good management means never allowing the circumstances that will set your dog up to "fail" and get into a fight. Part of proper management is avoiding places like dog parks. Please note that even with heavy socialization some dogs still become intolerant of other dogs as adults.

Bringing your Pit Bull to a dog park where you have no control over the behavior of other dogs and no knowledge of their histories is akin to walking across a busy street and hoping the other cars will see you and stop. You are putting you and your dog at great risk for a benefit that can be achieved in a safer way (see below).

Should a Fight Ensur, Guess Who's at Fault?

You and your Pit Bull. It won't matter that the other dog started it, that he had been humping your dog the whole time or biting on her face or driving her nuts. If the Pit Bull was involved, the Pit Bull will be blamed. Should the media get wind of the event, you will be "wrong" in the news regardless of what actually happened. The myth of the Pit Bull will be reinforced, and yet another person will have a misconstrued story to tell.

The Safe Alternative: Small Play Groups

Your Pit Bull can still enjoy the company of other dogs. **The best way to accomplish this is through supervised play groups of 2-4 dogs your dog has met before and enjoys.** The other owners should also be present and supervising the play. Periodically stop the play and have each dog return to his/her owner to take a break. This will prevent over-arousal and helps keep things controlled.

Keep in mind that dog parks are not a necessity and your dog is not missing out if she doesn't attend them. Leisurely walks or jogs with you provide the best exercise, and small play groups give her a wonderful opportunity to play with other dogs!

Not sure if your dog is social enough to play with other dogs? Email us at info@ourpack.org.

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