



DOG PARKS

Dog parks have fast become a popular (and to some, essential) part of dog ownership. While some dogs may do well at dog parks, we feel that for many the dog park may potentially cause more problems. Why? Dog parks may not be the best idea for socialization. Some owners 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.

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 may swarm and overwhelm the newest visitor.

From the moment your dog or puppy is brought into the dog park, she may be surrounded by dogs all clamoring to sniff, lick, shove, 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 a dog that is being rude or not giving her enough space. At this point, your dog may have learned that the dog park is a very scary, overwhelming place and that other dogs can be unpleasant creatures! This can possibly cause behavior issues in the future.

From Puppies to Adulthood

Most young puppies do great in social settings like dog parks. However, as your puppy matures her attitude with other dogs may change. In the chaotic and confusing setting of a dog park, she may be threatened or pushed around by another dog and feel that she needs to protect herself. If there is an altercation and you have a "pit bull," she will likely be blamed for it whether or not she instigated it. 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 best way to socialize your dog to other dogs is through controlled positive interactions with balanced playmates that your dog has been introduced to slowly. Please see: Dog-Dog

Introductions. This way, you can create a positive atmosphere and closely monitor your dog's reactions. This sets your dog up for success. (Also read [**Socializing Your Dog**](#)).

Socializing your pup very early on in life is important. From birth to 12 weeks is a crucial time. However, even with heavy socialization, a dog's attitude toward other dogs may change as he or she matures. This can happen with dogs of any breed. Many dogs will be social with dogs throughout their lives; some will not get along with any dogs once they mature (around 2-3 years old). Many dogs may be somewhere in between. If you have a dog that is uncomfortable around other dogs, you can socialize him by taking him to a class where he can learn to be more comfortable around other dogs while on leash. (Visit our [Classes](#) page for more information). Please call a trainer if you feel you need help.

An Alternative: Small Play Groups

Your dog can still enjoy the company of other dogs. The best way to accomplish this is through supervised play groups of dogs with whom your dog has been properly introduced. 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!

If you feel that your dog may have issues with other dogs email us at info@ourpack.org.

Stephanie Lam and Marthina McClay
Our Pack, Inc.

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