



While dog parks can be great for socialization, they're not the right fit for every dog. Factors such as age, personality, and past experiences all play a role, and without proper precautions, a visit can even be unsafe. Follow these tips to determine whether dog parks are right for your pet—and, if they are, how to keep them safe and happy during playtime.

## BEFORE VISITING

**Know your dog** Not all dogs enjoy meeting new dogs. Certain personality types, ages, and ailments are not a good fit for dog parks. Older dogs with arthritic issues or who are set in their ways should not play at a dog park. Young puppies, inexperienced adolescent dogs, and shy, fearful dogs of any age can also struggle in this environment.

**Take a test run at home** If your canine companion has not interacted regularly with unfamiliar dogs, introduce yours to a friend's dog in a controlled environment to find out how they will react and determine if they are a candidate for dog park playtime.

**Observe the dog park** Before bringing your dog into the park, take time to watch how the dogs interact and get a feel for the park's overall energy. Consider visiting without your dog first to assess whether it's a good fit for their personality. One bad experience—like an aggressive encounter—can outweigh dozens of positive visits and may permanently affect how your dog feels about the park.

**Learn dog body language** Knowing the difference between fear, play, and anger in your dog and others can help you understand when to step in and help avoid bad situations.

# THE FACTS ABOUT DOG PARKS

**Be aware of immunizations** Puppies under four months old aren't fully immunized and are at higher risk of contracting diseases. They are also vulnerable to trauma if another dog is aggressive. With older dogs, it is just as important to keep up on vaccinations and worm medications to avoid picking up an infection.

## AT THE DOG PARK

**Dog parks are governed by dog behaviour** When a dog enters a dog park for the first time, it becomes a target for the more dominant, energetic dogs there, who gauge where they fit into the hierarchy of dogs at the park. This behaviour can be terrifying for puppies, adolescent dogs, or pets that tend to be shy or fearful. Unfortunately, repeated negative experiences like this can contribute to long-term behavioural issues, including leash reactivity or aggression, as dogs may learn to strike first out of fear of being dominated or attacked.

**Start out slow, at a less busy time** Weekday evenings tend to be peak traffic times, along with all day on weekends and holidays. Keep initial visits short (around 15 minutes) and slowly increase the length of your stays as your dog becomes more comfortable with the atmosphere.

**Do not bring toys or food** Most dog parks are full of balls, toys, and treats from other owners. Rewarding your canine companion in front of other dogs can create jealousy and aggression.

**Always supervise your dog** Leave young children at home—you can't safely watch both them and your dog at the same time. Stay alert and avoid distractions, even when socializing with other dog owners. Keep a close eye on your dog's body language to catch signs of stress or tension early and prevent potential conflicts.

**Make sure your dog wears a collar with up-to-date ID tags in case they escape** For safety during play, choose a quick-release collar to prevent accidents—dogs can get their mouths caught in each other's collars, which can lead to serious injury.

**Be mindful of dogs that play rough** Play between dogs is a test of each other's strength without resorting to fighting. Not all dogs like to be rolled, pinned, or knocked over, especially if they have sore joints. It is these mismatches that can quickly turn playtime into scuffles. Dogs that play rough should be matched with other dogs that can tolerate rough play.

**NEVER physically intervene in a dog fight** Fighting dogs have no allegiance to anyone – they are fighting for THEIR life. In the event of a scuffle, squirt the dogs with a water bottle or try to distract them, but never reach in yourself to break it up. If your dog injures a person or pet, give your name and phone number to the injured party. Report any handlers who refuse to take liability for damages and who are endangering the safety of others to law enforcement authorities.

**Know when to leave** If you see your dog growing fearful, being bullied or threatened, or becoming aggressive, overexcited, or overtired, remove them from the park. Don't be pressured by other dog owners – they don't know your dog the way you do, and your dog's welfare should be your top priority.

**The dog park isn't the right fit for every pet and dogs don't need to meet every dog they see. If your canine companion is not a fan, it does not mean you are a bad owner! Some dogs just need a less charged play environment to feel calm and safe.**



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