



# IS THE DOG PARK RIGHT FOR YOUR DOG?

Dog parks can offer both positive and negative experiences for your dog, so exercise caution. All dogs in the park should be vaccinated, well-socialized and responsive to verbal cues. It's usually safer to set up play groups with family members', friends' or neighbors' dogs since smaller groups are easier to manage. If you decide to bring your dog to the local park, here are some tips to follow.

## First things first...

- Your dog should be spayed or neutered, current on vaccines, over 6 months old, and healthy.
- They should respond well to their name and come when called.
- As a safety measure for dogs without leash aggression, it may be best to hold onto your dog's leash when greeting others in case you need to remove your dog quickly. Once you're sure they're getting along, can you allow your dog to play off leash.
- Some parks have separate areas for larger dogs to play in and another for smaller dogs. When available, utilize the proper pen for your dog's size. Similar age, size and play style is ideal. If your dog likes to play rough, they could accidentally injure a smaller or more timid dog. We do not recommend mixed-sized play groups.
- For the first few visits, pick a quiet park with low activity that is also clean and well-maintained.
- Be prepared to separate or intervene if necessary. Use a compressed air can, air horn, whistle, water, etc., to separate a fight. NEVER put yourself between fighting dogs.
- Take breaks, even when things are going well.

## AVOID dog parks if...

- Your dog has a high prey drive and/or becomes over-aroused easily. These dogs have trouble calming down, and this can lead to aggression.
- Your dog guards and/or becomes aggressive when around toys, food, water, etc.
- Your dog is a bully toward others, OR they're the recipient of bullying and therefore avoid other dogs, tremble, or otherwise show they are uncomfortable.
- You (the owner) are not paying enough attention or don't understand normal canine behaviors and/or body language.
- Your dog has had a bad experience at the park and now displays behavior issues (ie: reactive and acting aggressive when they see another dog).

## What can I do instead?

- Arrange private play dates with dogs you know who are healthy, friendly and a good match. Reach out to family members, friends and neighbors.
- Exercise your dog more. Jogging, fetch, Frisbee, blowing bubbles, etc. are all great activities to get your dog moving.
- If your lifestyle allows, consider getting a second dog who can be your dog's best friend.