

## Is Your Dog Ready for the Dog Park?

There are markers that owners should ensure to determine whether their dog and the dog park are a good fit.

- A dog should be reliably trained to come when called.
- A dog should obey basic commands - such as come, down, leave it, and stay - in distracting environments prior to going to a dog park. If your dog tunes you out when they're having fun, you won't get their attention in the dog park.
- A dog should be socialized with other dogs before going to a dog park. If your dog is shy or nervous, the dog park may be a nightmare for them.
- A reactive or aggressive dog does not welcome an onrush of strange dogs anywhere, including a dog park.
- If your dog is a resource guarder - dogs that guard their owners, balls, etc. – they may not interact well with other dogs.

### **Remember – Off Leash does not mean out of control!**

**When arriving at the dog park**, pay attention to your dog's gestures and what they're telling you. If there is a gang rushing the entrance to "welcome" you and making an intimidating situation for your dog, wait until they disperse before going in. Take your dog's leash off as soon as you get inside the gate, so they don't feel trapped. Please keep your leash with you at all times in case you need to leash your dog for control should unwanted behavior occur while within the park.

**Like people, all dogs have different personalities.** Please respect the needs of all dogs and their owners and discourage your dog from behaviors that commonly trigger conflict, such as charging, ambushing and stalking, which are predatory behaviors that can be especially threatening to an unfamiliar dog. Mounting, incessant barking and general pestering of another dog should be addressed and stopped.

**Intervene** if other dogs repeatedly roll your dog to the ground or chase your dog despite being told to stop. If owners do not call off their dog, control them and move away, these instances can become serious encounters. For younger dogs, bad experiences with other dogs may make them wary or frightened of other dogs for the rest of their life.

**Our dog park has plenty of room!** If your dog is the one exhibiting conflict-triggering behavior, please leash them up and take them to a more secluded area of the park. If your dog persists, kindly leave the park. Your dog will eventually learn that bad behavior ends the outings and spoils the fun.

**Many dogs love rambunctious play, but many do not** - learn how to tell the difference.

Common social behaviors include wrestling, chasing & pouncing, growling and even “mouthing” play bites. Bouncy, inefficient, joyous movement distinguishes these play behaviors from “lock and load” predatory behavior.

**Growling or snapping** at another dog usually occurs when another dog is pushy or violates personal space by getting too close, too fast. This is a normal and often justified reaction towards a rude or persistent dog. “Herding dogs” are, by their nature, notorious neck, heel and butt nippers. This biting behavior is mischievous but rarely harmful. Regardless, if it is threatening or annoying to another dog owner, these dogs should be brought under control and moved to a more secluded area.

**Learn to read your dog and avoid situations that are stressful. Try not to overreact to rambunctious play, but do not be afraid to speak up if you are concerned.**

**Though dog fights are uncommon, they do happen.** Even the best trained dogs are not always on perfect behavior. Hopefully, dog owners will recognize aggressive, threatening signals and behaviors, intervene and separate the dogs before a fighting or biting incident occurs. Should you find yourself in this situation, **do not** reach in to separate fighting dogs without attempting some type of distraction. Squirt water in the dog’s faces, jackets or towels can be thrown over the dog’s heads, etc. - anything to distract them long enough to get them separated. Once separated, leash up your dog and move to another area to visually inspect your dog. Fighting / Biting incidents should be reported using the Dog Park Incident Report system.

**In short, know your dog’s characteristics and body language and react appropriately if you see signs of distress or aggression while at the dog park. Pay attention to your dog and your dog’s interactions and intervene if necessary. Have your leash with you at all times for control and separation from stressful situations.**

Should you decide your dog and the dog park are not a good match, don’t worry! You can socialize in other ways, like meeting up with a familiar dog in one of our parks or interacting with other leashed dogs on the township’s pathway system.

**For your dog, nothing replaces their time with you!** Your dog can be happy with or without a dog park experience.