

DOG PARK TIPS

BEFORE YOU GO

RECONNAISSANCE - The first time you go to a dog park, go without your dog. Make sure the park is safe, secure and clean. Ideally, the park should have a double gated entry, separate area for small dogs, water source, shade/sheltered area and garbage cans for pet waste.

SMALL DOGS - If you have a small dog, find a park that has a separate area for the little guys. During all the excitement of play, it's very easy for a smaller dog to get bowled over by the larger guys.

HEALTH - Ensure your dog is up-to-date on all vaccinations and flea/tick control as recommended by your veterinarian. Do not take your dog to the dog park if she is showing signs of injury or sickness.

KNOW YOUR DOG - Not all dogs like to play with other dogs or are nervous around other dogs. Nor do all dogs have the same play style. Know your dog's play style and preference for canine companions. If your dog isn't polite or friendly with other dogs or is nervous of other dogs, consider attending a training class first to make her more comfortable.

OBEDIENCE - Ensure your dog can respond to basic obedience cues such as, "Sit," "Down," "Stay," and "Come." Consider enrolling in an obedience class to get the doggie basics down and a specialty class that allows you and your dog to practice "recalls" in safe, controlled environments before heading to the dog park.

BE A DOG DETECTIVE - Be knowledgeable about dog body postures, communication signals and social behavior. You should be able to recognize stress, tension, fear, play, threats and aggression. Know the difference between play (which can be very active and sound scary) and real threats. Know when to intervene and when to stay out of an interaction among dogs.

SUPPLIES - Have plenty of water on hand (for both you and your dog), as well as a water bowl. It's always a good idea to have a doggie first aid kit and cell phone handy in case of any emergencies.

WHILE YOU ARE THERE

ENTERING THE PARK - Often, dogs already in the park will rush up to the gate to greet the new arrival. Wait a few minutes for the excitement to dwindle and enter the park when the other dogs have wandered off. As soon as you enter the gate, take off your dog's leash. Mixing leashed dogs with unleashed dogs can create a stressful situation.

STAY CONNECTED - You don't have to be on high alert at the dog park, but you want to ensure your dog is having a good time. Continuously monitor your dog's interactions with other dogs and people. Ensure your dog is playing appropriately and not getting bullied by other dogs. If your dog is getting overwhelmed or is getting a bit rough with her play, don't be afraid to leave the park to give your dog a chance to relax and calm down.

TOYS & TREATS - It's best to leave the toys and treats at home or in the car, as not all dogs are great at sharing. Don't be afraid, however, to give out plenty of pets and praise to your dog during your time in the park.

