

COME ON FIDO LET'S GO TO THE DOG PARK!

I hear from people who think the dog park is a fabulous experience for them and their dog. I hear from others who wouldn't take their dog to a dog park. I take my dog to the dog park every day and she and I have a very good time. The "Dogs Run Free" dog park has been in Condon Park since 2009 and lots of fun has been had there. There have also been very minimal occasions of dog fights and even dog bites and small children getting knocked over and some dogs contracting kennel cough. If you choose to be a dog park goer there are a few things to consider to optimize fun and safety.

In writing this I asked Animal Control what they get called for in regards to the dog park. I asked a few veterinarians what they see, if anything, from the dog park. There are a few things that we all need to keep in mind. It is our #1 job to pay attention to what our dog is doing, as well as the other dogs. There are few, but

some incidences of dogs at the dog park who do not have the temperament or manners to be there. There is no professional dog trainer there and so we each must fulfill that role. The best time to break up a dog fight is before it actually gets started. If you see signs of ears, tail and body positioned forward, rigid muscles

and intense focus things aren't going well. This is may be the time to put your dog on a leash and leave the park for the time being. Whether it's your dog or someone

else's get your dog out of the way. If your dog is being bullied or endlessly pestered it might be a good thing to leave and come back tomorrow. Safety comes before

being "right". Always protect your dog!

The few dog fights I have seen, usually happen when two unneutered dogs are in the park at the same time. I knew a dog who had been coming to the park for well over a year and played nicely with all the dogs. One day another unneutered male entered the park and he made a beeline for that dog and attacked him.

Fortunately the other dog was not hurt badly, but the owner was not happy. Save yourself the trouble and money of paying for veterinary bills. I am not saying

that all unneutered male dogs get into dog fights, but it isn't uncommon when it comes to being with other unneutered dogs, especially in a dog park where there are plenty of female dogs.

Your dogs need to be vaccinated before they come to the park. Young puppies are not fully immunized and protected until they have had a series of three or four Parvo/Distemper shots. These are very costly diseases and can even be deadly if your pup catches one of them. Also, kennel cough (not usually as serious as parvo and distemper) can be contracted in the dog park. I cringe when I see unvaccinated puppies out walking around. Sometimes letting the uninformed owner know the jeopardy they are putting their dog in is appreciated and sometimes it isn't.

If your dog is a ball chaser, before you take your dog to the park be sure that he/she is not territorial over their ball. This is a way for a dog fight to ensue, when one dog claims ownership and another dog gets the ball. You also have to watch to see what the other dog's behavior is. Some people feel that their dog is bomb proof and may be, and don't consider that the dog park attendees all have different temperaments and different levels of socialization.

One day I saw a very small child (about 2 years old) walking through the park unattended by the parents who were at least 200 feet away. This is how horrible accidents happen. It is unlikely that a single dog is going to walk up to the child and bite it or attack it. Let's imagine a pack of dogs having a good time chasing each other plows that child down. Probably even that wouldn't result in injury. However, it could frighten the child who falls to the ground squealing and sounding like prey. When dogs pack up they may do things they wouldn't do individually and worse case scenario you have a small child seriously injured by several dogs; who are great dogs and on their own would never attack a child. A friend of mine got her leg broken in a dog park by getting run over by a pack of running dogs who were having so much fun they paid no attention to my friend and plowed her down. It's best that small children don't come to the park, but if they must, then keep very close tabs on them. They are precious and certainly precious to their parents; protect them.

If you adopt a dog from a rescue/shelter or even a breeder, do not bring that dog to the dog park until you and the dog have established a trusting relationship and

you have some idea of its character and its quirks. I have seen people at the park with a dog they got at the shelter two hours ago. Remember this dog may have come to the shelter as a stray and living at a shelter with lots of other animals can have its own set of stressors. This dog has been handled by many different people and does not have an allegiance to you within the first two hours. It is recommended that it takes from six weeks to three months for shelter dog to decompress and build trust and feel confident and know that he/she is safe with you. Your dog will have more confidence if he/she understands the rules of the road as decided by you. All of us are more secure when we know what is expected of us. A secure dog will do much better with other dogs than an insecure dog manifested by timidity or aggression (often aggression is an "I'm gonna' get you before you get me" behavior). Secure and confident dogs are less of a target for bullies. Other dogs seem to seek their equilibrium and like them.

Love your dog, protect it and have fun with it. My dog, ChuChu has a blast chasing her ball at the dog park. She knows her MaMa is always looking out for her. She can just relax and have a good time. A few times when another dog has gotten too reckless with her I just remove her from the situation and come back another time. I have had to do this maybe 3 times in six years. Some people might feel, the other dog is the problem, their owner needs to remove them. But remember your number one job is to protect your dog, no matter whose fault it is. I do not want my dog to ever have the experience of being attacked and trying to defend herself. I love her and I look out for her.