

### **First time visitors**

For all first-time dog park visitors, consider visiting the park without your pet. Familiarize yourself with the posted rules and how the park works. This will allow you to get a lay of the facility so you know what to expect. Talk to other dog owners during this trip and gather information. Ask if there have been problems with other dogs and try to determine what the peak and non-peak hours are.

Remember, even dogs can get stressed and over-excited. Taking your pet during non peak hours may be a good way to ease your family member into the new experience. Just like people, dogs need some time to get comfortable with other dogs. Many dogs will be experiencing the off-leash environment for the first time and may not be used to the excitement and level of energy. It also takes time for a new dog to become comfortable with the idea that other dogs all share this neutral environment.

Please watch your dog closely. If your dog acts aggressively, please put the dog on a leash immediately and leave. Keep in mind that everyone at the park wants the same thing - socialized dogs that can have fun playing together.

At times, the park can become quite crowded. If you are not sure how your dog will react to the current conditions, don't put pressure on your dog by forcing him/her into what he/she thinks is a threatening situation. Instead, come back at another time when it is less crowded. The first visit can be a little stressful for both you and your dog, so keep it short and happy. Gradually work your way to longer visits. Leaving early when your dog is having a good time will make it more likely that your dog will be anxious to return for another visit.

### **Leashing your dog**

Keep your dog leashed at all times while outside the fenced dog park area. Even if your pet is under perfect voice control, many non-dog people have fears and any dog off-leash outside the fenced area violates the City's Leash Law. Dogs must be kept on a leash until the owners/handlers and dog(s) are inside the double-gated transition area. Leashes should be removed while inside the double-gated transition area. Some dogs can feel threatened if they are leashed in the presence of unleashed dogs. Mixing leashed and unleashed dogs can be an explosive situation. Leashed dogs, and their humans, often display body language and behavior that is threatening to the free dogs and may provoke them to be threatening and defensive in return. Keep a collar on your dog at all times so you have something to grab, if needed.

### **Entering the park**

Do not enter the double-gated transition area if there is already someone in there. Make sure that the gates are secured in front of and behind you when entering and leaving the park. Quickly move away from the entrance area as you enter. That will help disperse the group of dogs that will come over to welcome your dog to the park. Move away from the fence so that your dog will not feel cornered or threatened. This will lessen the problem caused when several off-leash dogs already in the park come running over to greet the new arrival, perhaps overwhelming the arriving dog. And of course, be sure to ask any owners/handlers at the park to secure their dogs so that you and your dog can come into the park without a struggle.

### **Stay alert!**

Keep your head on a swivel at all times as there will likely be groups of dogs running around the park and having fun. People standing around are obstructions - a dog being chased may try to run its pursuer into a person in order to gain an advantage. Stay alert!

### **Keep walking**

Walking defuses defensive behaviors and helps to keep the off-leash area a neutral territory. This means your dog is more likely to pass by another dog with just a curious sniff rather than a stare-down. Limit the time you spend standing or sitting and chatting. When folks congregate, many dogs may become protective of their people and their space, making scuffles more likely to occur.

#### *About choke and prong collars:*

Remember that choke, prong, or spiked collars are not allowed inside the off-leash area. Each of these collar types can result in injury to its wearer, another dog, or a person depending on the situation. If a choke collar gets hung up on something while running, its wearer can become choked. Some dogs, while playing, like to softly bite the back of another dog's neck. Dogs wearing prong collars receive a much stronger bite during this type of play, while dogs wearing spiked collars can inflict injury.

### **Be responsible!**

Be a responsible dog owner - if your pet has a contagious condition, STAY AWAY from the dog park until a Vet has said that there is no danger to other dogs. For your own dog's and all other dogs' protection, your dog needs to be current on all of their vaccinations. Please know and follow the rules! Complaints about you or your dog threaten the success of these sites.

### **Be aware that dogs have different play styles.**

Educate yourself about dog behavior. Behavior that concerns some dog owners may simply be a rambunctious play style. Always respect other dog owners' wishes if they are not comfortable with how your dog is interacting with theirs. Simply move to another part of the park for awhile. Leash up and leave if your dog is acting in an aggressive manner or having a bad day. The owner of any dog displaying mounting behavior must immediately leash and remove the dog from the situation.

### **Dog waste bags and receptacles.**

Our dog park is equipped with waste receptacles and plenty of bags, so please use them! The complaint most heard from opponents of dog parks is the handling of waste matter and the upkeep of the park. Please clean up after your own pet and while visiting, help pick up any "orphan poop" that someone else might have missed. Continued use of this park will depend on our control of this issue and pitching in to help.

### **Digging**

Owners must stop their dogs from digging and are responsible for quickly filling in any holes or repairing any damage their dog causes.

### **Clean up**

Please clean up YOUR park. Trash, cigarette butts (SMOKING IS NOT PERMITTED WITHIN THE PARK), and anything else on the ground may end up in a dog's mouth. Before you drop something on the ground, ask yourself "Would I want my dog to eat this?" We must all work to keep our park clean.

### **No bare feet!**

There are rocks, wood chips, and perhaps other debris in the park. Avoid getting infections by keeping your shoes on!

### **Food items**

Do not bring human or dog food / treats into the dog park. Many dogs are on diets to keep their weight under control. Some dogs have food allergies and that treat might make a dog ill. A normally well-behaved dog can jump at or lunge for food, especially tasty human food, when hungry. Food can also initiate a fight.

### **Prevent injuries**

Dog owner is liable for injuries and damage inflicted by their dog. Watch your dog carefully! If your dog injures a person or a dog, give your name and phone number to the injured party. Report to law enforcement authorities any handlers who refuse to take responsibility for damages/injuries and who are endangering the safety of others. Record their license plate number if possible.

### **Know your dog**

Not all dogs like meeting new dogs. If your dog has not regularly interacted with dogs, find out how he will react before forcing him to meet lots of unfamiliar dogs. Invite a few mellow dogs over to your friend's big yard to play. Check for obedience schools that offer socialization classes for adult dogs. Be sure to socialize puppies (8-16 weeks of age) at a puppy kindergarten class. Early socialization is one of the most important things you will ever do for your dog! Do not bring dogs with known aggressive tendencies into the Dog Park. You are risking harm to others and creating a potential liability for yourself. Mounting can initiate a potentially harmful situation.

### **Service gate**

The dog park fencing contains one (1) service gate located at the rear of the park. This gate provides access for the City's maintenance and landscape crews and their equipment. It is NOT intended for use by park visitors and their dogs and is to be kept locked unless in use by authorized personnel. So, PLEASE DO NOT enter the fenced-in, off-leash area through the rear service gate. This gate do not provide the control that you need to have over the dogs while entering or exiting the Park. Additionally, dogs already in the off-leash area, including dogs that might be unfriendly toward your dog, might escape as you enter the Park through this unauthorized service gate. If you find an unlocked maintenance gate, PLEASE NOTIFY THE CITY as soon as possible @ (252) 329-4567 during normal business hours (Monday - Friday, 9:00 am -; 5:00 pm, legal holidays excluded).

## **CHILDREN IN THE DOG PARK**

REMEMBER, CHILDREN UNDER 55 INCHES ARE NOT ALLOWED IN THE DOG PARK.

The Dog Park is NOT a safe place for children. It was created as a place for people to enjoy their dogs off-leash and for dogs to interact with other dogs. Children could be considered an interruption in dog play and playful, unsupervised children and playful, unleashed dogs mixed together could result in injury. Small children are at greater risk of being injured at a dog park than are older children and adults. This is a playground for dogs, not children. There are plenty of other parks where children can safely play and socialize. The Dog Park is not a petting zoo or a place to “get the child over his/her fear of dogs.” You take full responsibility of your child’s safety while at the Dog Park.

### *Dangers*

- While most dogs are curious and friendly, not all dogs are child-friendly. Many dogs do not live with kids and have not been socialized to children. Young children sometimes have not learned that not all dogs like to be petted and may feel scared or threatened if a child runs toward them or grabs at them.
- Dogs often run fast and play vigorously with each other while in the park and they may inadvertently knock down and hurt a child who is standing out in the open.
- Dogs can jump high enough to investigate babies in front/back packs. In this case, a dog may inadvertently knock the parent down causing injury to the parent and infant.
- Herding dogs may nip at children while attempting to "round them up."
- Young children often run instead of walk, and scream instead of talk--these actions can cause some dogs to get overly excited. A running, squealing or screaming child attracts attention and may become a target for many dogs with strong prey-chasing instincts, because the child resembles an injured animal or prey.
- Direct eye contact is confrontational to dogs. Interested children are just the right height to make direct eye contact with dogs, placing them at great risk from dogs which consider this a confrontational challenge.
- Never let your child have toys or food in a dog park. A friendly dog might knock down your child to get at a bright ball or cookie.
- All dogs have the potential to bite. A small child is more likely to be at a dog's face level, and more likely to be bitten in the face if a bite occurs.

### *Health risks*

- Children are more susceptible to contracting intestinal worms and other infections from touching grass where feces or urine are present. That is one

major reason dogs are prohibited from children's playgrounds and school yards. Be sure your children (and you) always wear shoes in a dog park.

- Children can pick up fleas, lice, or skin mites from infected dogs.
- Tennis balls may carry disease and contamination.

### **Children over 55 inches**

IF YOU DO DECIDE TO BRING YOUR OLDER CHILDREN (OVER 55 INCHES) TO THE DOG PARK, please be sure to teach your children how to behave properly in a dog park environment and make sure your child follows these rules:

- Do not wave your arms wildly
- Do not run and scream

### ***Do not chase or tease the dogs***

- Do not allow your child to bring toys

### ***Do not approach or pet any dog without owner's presence and permission.***

- Do not make and hold eye contact with a dog. Direct eye contact is confrontational to dogs.
- Do not pick up and wave sticks

### ***Also, teach them how to react if an emergency situation occurs:***

- Never run.
- Hide face, fold arms, and stand still 'like a tree' or
- Lie down
- Tuck arms and legs into the body, and lie 'like a log'
- Wait till an adult arrives or the dog leaves

Remember, your main responsibility while in the park is to monitor your dog(s) and to be prepared to intervene if there is any sign of trouble. Before bringing children to the park, consider whether you can effectively supervise both the dog and the children at the same time. If you choose to bring your children within the park, you should SUPERVISE THEM VERY CLOSELY!! PARENTS, KEEP YOUR CHILDREN WITHIN REACH. The safest place for your child while in the Dog Park is standing by his/her parents' side or holding their hand.

## **ABOUT DOG FIGHTS**

Dog fights in dog parks are rarely a problem, because dogs consider it to be neutral territory. This is because, since all of them are visitors, none of the dogs is protecting its own turf. The best way to prevent a fight is not to allow it to happen in the first place. Know your dog, understand canine communication, monitor situations carefully, and be prepared to intervene before stress, over-stimulation, or aggressions escalate into a full-fledged fight. Do not bring dogs with known aggressive tendencies to the park. You are risking harm and creating a potential liability for yourself. Try to keep your dogs out of the corners of the fenced in area. Dogs playing in a group that get 'trapped' in a corner may feel threatened or fearful. If a dog fight occurs, owners are responsible for immediately breaking it up. Both owners must get control of their dogs immediately. If one owner gets control of his or her dog but the other owner does not; this creates a very dangerous situation for the first dog and owner. Other owners should get hold of their own dogs, and divert their attentions elsewhere. The sight of a fight breaking out sometimes incites other dogs to get involved.

### ***4P Warning Signs***

Prevent a Dog Fight Before It Happens -Learn the 4P Warning Signs

- **Posture**  
A dog's body language can communicate fear, hostility or submission. Learn to read and respond to your own dog's body language, and others.
- **Packing**  
More than 2 dogs packed together can lead to trouble. Break it up before it starts by leading your dog to a neutral area at least 30 feet away.
- **Possession**  
Whether it's you, a ball, or a treat, most dogs will protect what is theirs. Remain aware.
- **Provoking**  
If your dog is continuously annoying another dog or dogs, or provoking attention, it's time to leave the park.

### ***What you Can do to prevent a dog fight***

- Most importantly, **KNOW YOUR DOG** - what he does and doesn't tolerate; signs that he is getting annoyed; his unique body language;
- If there is a dog in the park "pushing his buttons" keep them apart. It's a large park move to the opposite end.
- If it looks like there is about to be a problem distract the dogs. Call, whistle, throw a tennis ball at them, squirt them with a water bottle -- whatever it takes to turn their attention to you.

- BE VIGILANT -- know where your dog is at all times. Never be more than a few steps away.

Learn signs indicating impending problems, like; Dominant body language and posturing i.e. one dog placing his head over the back of another, sideways looks; standing stiffly; pinning.

Packing can get out of hand when there are too many dogs or a bad mix of dogs;

Humping Most dogs will just "bark off" a dog if he doesn't like being mounted. If the other dog doesn't "take the hint" ask that owner for help.

Bad Mix Some days there is just a bad mix of dogs. If you feel uncomfortable, trust your intuition. Take your dog out and come back later.

### **What To Do If a Fight Occurs**

An injured dog may bite anyone nearby. A dog fight can be violent and is upsetting to everyone present.

- Keep calm. Even the calmest, most pleasant, well-adjusted person may become upset, angry or belligerent, if they or their dog is injured in a fight. Emotional behavior is automatic; try to remain calm and as objective as possible.
- Never reach your hands into the middle of a dog fight. You may get bit, and often by your own dog.
- Distract the dogs and divert their attention. A blast of water from a water bottle, a loud whistle, or a pocket air horn may work.
- If your dog is not in the fight, make sure he does not join in.
- If a fight occurs, control your dog and remove him to a neutral area.
- Maintain a cool head. Getting upset and yelling will only add to the frenzy.

When warranted, exchange contact information with the other dog owners. If you can't because you must attend to your dog, designate someone else to get information. Remember, owners are solely liable for injuries or damage caused by their dogs. This includes injury to another dog or person, no matter how it began, who said what, or whatever.