



Dog Parks and Other Off-Leash Areas

Animal Behavior Service

Summertime is a great time to get outdoors with our dogs, and many of us take advantage of the nice weather by visiting dog parks and other off-leash areas with our furry family members. Unfortunately, not every dog is a “good dog park citizen,” so problems can arise.

Here are some tips that can help ensure you and your dog have a fun experience when playing off-leash:

- Make sure your dog is up-to-date on vaccinations and that you have purchased any necessary licenses or permits required for the park you are intending to visit.
- Educate yourself on dog behavior. It's best not to assume you intuitively know what your dog or other dogs are doing or why. If you can't differentiate play wrestling and mouthing from fighting and biting, happy barking from angry barking, joyful postures from fearful ones, or a game of merry chase from predation, take the time to educate yourself before you bring your dog to a dog park.
- Choose an off-peak day for your first visit so you and your dog won't have as many new friends to meet. Slowly acquaint yourself with the way dogs act with each other. If you've just adopted a dog for the first time, don't visit a dog park until you are fully acquainted with your new dog's quirks and mannerisms.
- Don't bring your dog to a dog park if he has ever shown aggression towards strangers, dog or human. This is not the place to “break” a dog of violent behavior. A dog park is also not the place to practice training or tricks.
- Ultimately, you are responsible for your dog. If a situation develops that causes you to fear for the safety of your dog or yourself, it's best to leave the dog park.

The Animal Behavior Service at the University of Minnesota Veterinary Medical Center focuses on the behavior of companion animals -- the prevention of behavior problems through client education as well as the assessment and treatment of existing behavior problems.

For more information, please visit www.cvm.umn.edu/vmc/behavior.