

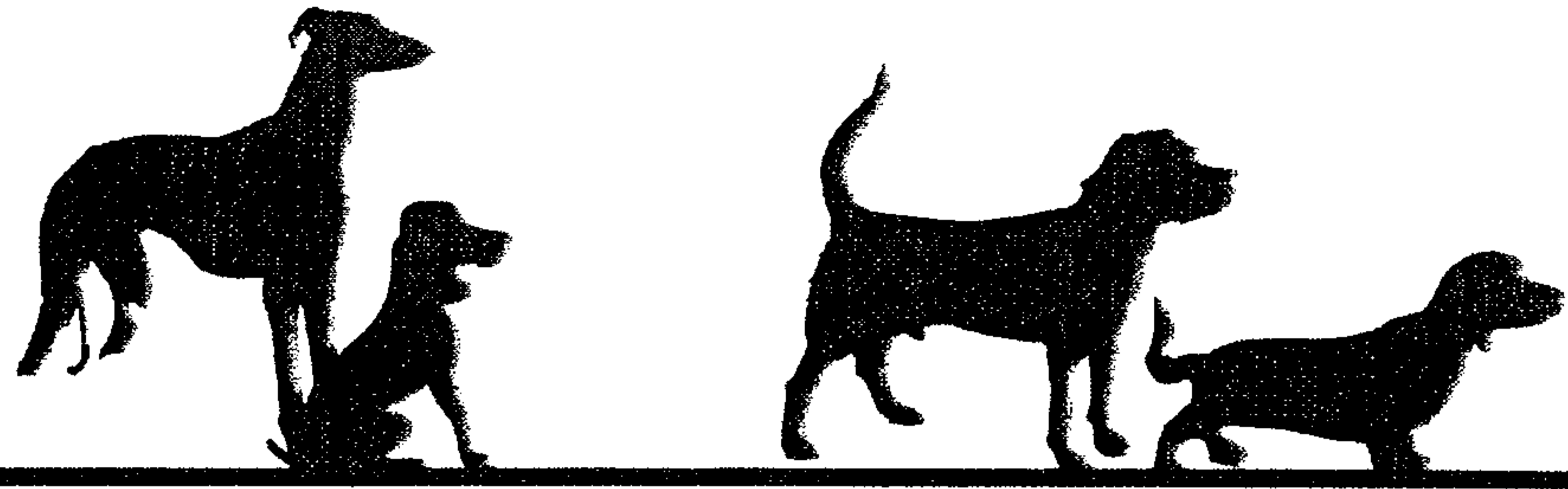
Dog Parks

Behavior, Play, Body Language, and Safety

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DOG PARKS

General Guidelines:

1. Prior to ever taking your dog to a dog park, visit the park first without your dog. Become familiar with the layout, park rules, park setup, cleanliness, behavior of the dogs at the park, as well as the behavior of the people at the park. Keep in mind, the group dynamic (for both dogs and people) can change drastically depending on the time of day and/or the day of the week you go to observe. It is a good idea to go to the park on the day(s)/time(s) you would want to take your dog to the park.
2. Many dogs don't actually like meeting dogs they do not know. This is more likely to be true for more mature dogs (older than two years of age), has had limited interaction with unknown dogs, or may have a genetic/breed tendency that influences behavior toward dogs.
3. Avoid taking puppies to dog parks (under 4 months of age). They are more at risk for contracting infections and diseases. Be sure your puppy has had at least three sets of vaccinations (DHPP) and a rabies vaccine (which cannot be administered until the dog is 4 months of age) prior to ever going to the dog park with your puppy.
4. It is not a good idea to take your small dogs into the park with large dogs. A safe environment for your little dog is to have a separate area designated for small dogs. The exception to this may be many of your small terriers (i.e., Jack Russell, Cairn, Norwich, etc.), as they are strong and sturdy, and have the attitude of a larger dog!
5. Keep your first visit to the park short, as even a friendly dog can become stressed and overwhelmed (we can too!). Work toward longer visits over time.
6. Dog parks are for dogs, and bringing children to the park can be dangerous for the child.
 - Keep in mind there are dogs that are not friendly toward children.
 - Sudden movements and noises can trigger a dog's predatory drive, which can result in the dog wanting to chase/hunt/nip/herd the child.
 - Dogs can often play roughly and may run into a child, knocking him/her down causing injury to the child.

- From a health standpoint, children are more susceptible to contracting intestinal worms and other infections when they touch the grass and dirt at the dog park.
- Never bring babies or toddlers to a dog park
- Always have sufficient adult supervision when bringing children to the park
- Children should refrain from running, screaming, jumping and throwing things while in the dog park

Owner/Guardian Behavior:

1. It is very important to keep an eye on your dog at all times. If you are doing this, you can prevent problems or situations that might otherwise occur if you are not paying attention to what your dog is doing.
2. Be especially careful when entering the park, as this is a highly charged area. Dogs will crowd around, which can feel very overwhelming to the newcomer. If your dog is already in the park, do everything you can to move your dog away from the gate to avoid overcrowding the newcomer. Be sure to gently and slowly move your dog away from the gate.
3. All interactions people have with the dogs in the park should be calm and controlled.
4. Carry your dog's leash with you at all times in case it is suddenly needed.
5. Owners should refrain from picking dogs up while they are inside the park. This may cause other dogs to jump up and nip at the person or the dog being held, which may cause injury.
6. Do not quickly grab a dog's collar. He may become startled and could suddenly snap. Instead, be sure to gently take hold of the collar, and talk in a calm voice while leading the dog away.
7. Avoid pushing dogs into each other while moving them. If a dog is put into another dog's personal space without invitation this could cause problems.
8. The potential for dog fights increases if the group of dogs crowds around people or into a tighter space. It is important to avoid any behavior that would encourage crowding of the dogs.
9. Owners should avoid standing in corners, or sitting on the ground. Placing yourself lower than the dogs will usually cause them to crowd around you wanting to interact. Injury could occur to you or the other dogs in this situation.
10. All food should be prohibited in the dog park area. This includes food people are eating or dog treats/food of any kind.
11. If your dog is behaving inappropriately (see below), at the least, you will probably need to intervene. At most, you may have to remove your dog from the dog park.
12. If your dog is not having a good time, you may want to remove your dog from the dog park. Dog parks should be a positive place for all the dogs that are there. If your dog is cowering, strongly avoiding other dogs, or nipping at dogs because he/she is afraid, then it is time to remove your dog from the park. You can try again another day to see if things go differently. Sometimes it's just the group of dogs that are present that can influence how your dog behaves when at the park.
13. Valuable items, such as rawhide, pig ears and toys should be kept out of the dog park area to reduce the possibility of aggressive behavior in the group. If a dog is

*Recommend
2-4
entrances
per area.*

going after his/her own ball or Frisbee, it is fine to do this as long as there aren't other dogs getting involved in the game. If other dogs do intervene, it is best to either stop playing this game with your dog, or to take your dog to the area designated for individual dogs.

Greeting Rituals:

Certain rituals occur when two dogs meet. If there is a variation of these rituals you may be seeing the first sign of problems between these two dogs.

Dogs usually approach one another sideways rather than head on. They will sniff each other's faces then move toward the rear end to sniff. It is important to allow this entire process to occur.

If one or both dogs freeze and fail to complete the ritual, redirect them by calling them toward you. Use short, staccato vocalizations to get the dog's attention. Try not to pull the dogs away from each other with the leash or collar, as this will cause frustration and could lead to aggressive behavior. The sequence stops during the greeting because there may be fear and/or aggression brewing. Wait a minute or two and start again.

Dogs that approach other dogs in a rude manner by pouncing on the other dog's head without stopping to sniff will often be reprimanded by the other dog. This is to be expected, but still needs to be monitored. It's best not to let two dogs meet when one or both are overly excited or stimulated at the time of the meeting. They need time to settle down before allowing them to meet.

Behavior is ever-changing and will be affected by many factors – time of day, individual dogs in the group affecting the 'group dynamic,' changes at home, health, diet, changes in owner behavior at the dog parks, and aging. There can be big changes in behavior, particularly during the maturing stage (7 months to 2 years of age).

Appropriate Dog Behavior/Play:

1. Appropriate Play (what it looks like)
 - a. Body Movements
 - i) Trading places
 - ii) Handicap themselves
 - iii) Invite by appearing smaller (play bows)
 - iv) Circular movements
 - v) Wide, relaxed tail wags
 - vi) Body is curvy/soft
 - vii) Lots of bouncing
 - viii) Body sideways – toward other dog(s)
 - ix) Stalk, chase
 - x) Bared teeth
 - xi) Ambush
 - xii) T Position (head over the shoulders of the other dog)
 - xiii) Shoulder/hip slams

- xiv) Circling and pushing
- xv) Boxing or sparring
- xvi) Attacking
- xvii) Mounting with or without pelvic thrust
- xviii) Biting littermates' face/head/neck area
- xix) Ears very erect or very flattened
- xx) Growling vocalizations
- b. Facial Expressions
 - i) Side looks
 - ii) Ears slightly back and relaxed
 - iii) Eyes more 'squinty'
- 2. Play Styles
 - a. Bouncy
 - b. Herding dogs
 - c. Loud physical dogs
 - d. Spastic dogs
 - e. Boxing dogs
 - f. Wrestling dogs ('pit' breeds, some labs)
 - g. Bullying dogs (this is not play)
- 3. Minor Problematic Play (orange flag)
 - a. Overly enthusiastic
 - b. Going vertical
 - c. Body slamming
 - d. Barking in another dog's face
 - e. Humping
 - f. Dominant 'pose'
 - g. Straight on
 - h. "Power" breeds
 - i) Mastiffs
 - ii) Pit Bull/Staffordshire Terriers
 - iii) Great Danes
 - iv) Shepherds
 - v) Terriers
- 4. Cut Off Signals
 - a. Sitting down
 - b. Freezing
 - c. Looking/turning away
 - d. Shaking off
 - e. Scratching head/neck
 - f. Sniffing ground
 - g. Stretching
 - h. Submissive grin
- 5. Serious Problematic Play (red flag)
 - a. Stalking
 - b. Stiff tail (wagging or not)
 - c. Staring

- d. Closing mouth
 - e. High arousal
 - f. Bullies – ignores calming and/or cutoff signals (won't let up)
 - g. Inappropriate – didn't learn how to play appropriately when young
 - h. Very rough – has caused skin breaks when 'playing' with other dogs
 - i. Extreme body slammers
6. Aggression
- a. Types of aggression (see Sacramento SPCA handout)
 - b. Managing – what to do – prevent if possible – prior to serious problematic play
 - walk between
 - call dogs away
 - verbal interruptive
 - water bottle (if available)
 - loud noise
 - Spray Shield
 - Physically breaking up 'full-blown' fights
 - * Always pull out the aggressor first
 - * Stand behind the dog, grasping both back legs (closest to stomach), lift legs off the ground and back up

*Play should be
3-5 min.
then break
30 sec - 1 min
+ play
again*

Dog Behavior:

1. Jumping - when a dog jumps on you, you want to turn away (and then maybe even walk away) ignoring the dog that is jumping up. Petting or even saying something like "get down" is giving the dog attention, which is just what the dog wants, and is rewarding to the dog.
2. Mounting – This is a fairly common behavior that dogs do to one another. It is primarily a sign of dominance, and is not usually sexual in nature. Some dogs will become very aggressive if mounted by another dog, which could lead to fighting. If the mounting behavior continues more than a couple of seconds, immediately interrupt the behavior using a short staccato sound (Agh! Or Hey!) and move toward the dog to let him/her know that you are about to intervene with this behavior. If the dog is still mounting once you are close to the dog, walk into the dog (no need to use hands!), letting him/her know that moving away is what you are making the dog do.
3. Poop eating – Picking up feces immediately will reduce this problem. There will be dogs that enjoy doing this. Some will even guard the poop and growl at other dogs or people who approach it. Distract the poop eating dog when another dog is getting ready to go. Immediate cleanup is really the only solution to this problem.
4. Barking – there are several reasons why dogs bark. Some will bark during play, some bark if anyone looks at them over the fence in the dog park area either out of fear or being territorial, some may bark because they are stressed, and others may bark at people just to get attention. It is important to reduce the amount of barking in the dog park area because it may irritate other dogs (and people!) and detracts from a fun, pleasant environment. The first approach would be to interrupt/distract the barker and then direct him to do something else. Say the dog's name, then

make a staccato sound with your voice, then encourage him to come toward you. If the dog is barking due to excessive stress, the dog park environment may not be for him.

Controlling Inappropriate Behavior:

1. Interrupting behavior – There are several ways to interrupt dogs. One of the first to try is to walk up to the two dogs playing, call their names in a happy high-pitched voice, or act silly. This will usually get the dogs to focus on you and stop what they were doing.
2. Timeouts – timeouts can help deter inappropriate behavior. If a dog is displaying a behavior, such as barking, say “timeout” and gently lead the dog to a crate. Set a timer for 2 minutes and return him to the dog park area. The timeout is used for safety and training, not as a way to relieve the staff’s frustrations.
3. Citronella Collar – This is a collar that would be worn by a dog that is an excessive barker. When the dog barks it will emit a puff of citronella spray which goes toward the dog’s face. This is a very strong deterrent for many dogs that bark. If the dog is barking out of fear or anxiety, it is not a good idea to utilize the collar. They will generally bark regardless of the spray, and the collar will become ineffective. The collar can sometimes go off if a dog near the one wearing the collar barks.

A note about corrections: It is important that we do not inadvertently correct a dog that is not doing anything wrong. If a person makes a loud noise (yelling, throwing objects, etc.) to discourage a dog from inappropriate behavior, it affects all dogs in the dog park area. This type of group punishment should not be used unless absolutely necessary (i.e., in the event of a fight).

Physical punishment of the dogs should be prohibited in the dog park. Rolling dogs on their back, grabbing them by the scruff of the neck, or pinning them while in the group (or anytime!) should not be used because this teaches the dogs to be wary of people.

→ These methods also put you at a higher risk of being bitten because dogs will often defend themselves when being handled in this manner.

If a person becomes overly emotional or frustrated, then a timeout for the person(s) is in order. This will ensure the dogs are not being punished excessively or unfairly. Most punishment can be avoided by being proactive, and redirecting behavior as early as possible.

What to do when Dogs Fight:

1. If dogs get into a fight, attempt to break them up by either making a loud noise with your voice and a hand clap, or if you have something handy to grab, such as two metal bowls you can make a loud noise by hitting them together. Throwing blankets or towels over fighting dogs can startle them enough to make them stop fighting momentarily. Bring Spray Shield with you to the park. This is citronella spray in a container that looks like pepper spray that can be used in breaking up dog fights. It will deter dogs that come running up when you are walking your dog as well.

2. If none of those measures stop the fight you may need to physically intervene. This is very risky because dogs will often bite the person(s) during the fight. Always pull out the aggressor first. Stand behind the dog, grasping both back legs (closest to stomach), lift legs off the ground and back up. As soon as they are separated remove them from the park immediately. Check for injuries and treat as needed. Check all people who were involved in the break up of the fight for injuries as well.
3. Take into account several factors to determine whether or not a dog should be allowed to continue coming to the park. If the two dogs in the fight have been involved in numerous minor incidents in the past, then not being allowed to return to the park is the best option. If the two particular dogs in the fight just don't like each other, then maybe the owners can agree on coming to the park at different times/days. Depending on the seriousness of the injury inflicted will depend on whether the dog is able to continue to come to the park.