

Park Etiquette

Outside the fenced area

Unless you are letting your dog swim in the creek, you must keep your dog on a leash outside of the fenced enclosures. Please, don't just open your car door and let your dog run to the gate. Even though cars should only be driving at 15mph within the park, this is fast enough to seriously injure your dog if he runs in front of a car.

Educate yourself on dog behavior

Learn how to read your dog's body language. Be aware that different dogs have different play styles. Ask questions. A behavior that concerns you may simply be a rambunctious play style. If you are ever uncomfortable about another dog's play style, talk nicely to the owner or leave the park and come back at another time. Please respect other people's concerns.

Muzzles in the park

If you are not sure about your dog but want to try bringing it to the dog park, don't be afraid to muzzle it. Muzzling your dog while it is in the Pooch Playground is not cruel; you are protecting your dog, the other dogs, and the privilege to use the Pooch Playground by doing this. Many greyhound owners use muzzles in the dog park.

Double-gated transition area

Wait to enter the double-gated transition area if someone is already in the area. This will eliminate the possibility of both gates being open at the same time. Please make sure the gates are securely shut behind you.

Remove your dog's leash as soon as possible

Inside the double-gated area is a good place to do this. Some dogs feel threatened if they are leashed in the presence of unleashed dogs. However, keep your leash with you in case you need to give your dog a brief time-out.

Move away from the entrance area

As soon as you enter the park, please move far away from the entrance. This will help keep the dogs from congregating at the gate and overwhelming new dogs arriving at the park. Try to keep your dog from rushing up to new arrivals at the gate. This will help disperse the group of dogs that come to welcome your dog to the park.

Keep moving

If you move, your dog will move too. If you stay in one place talking with other park users, you'll soon have a pack of dogs surrounding you. When you get too many dogs in the same area, they will get too aroused and the dog play could turn into a dog fight.

Watch your dog

Keep your head on a swivel so you can see where your dog is at all times.

Don't get so engrossed in conversation that you lose track of your best friend. Make sure your dog isn't being overwhelmed by more aggressive dogs and make sure your dog isn't engaging in "inappropriate" behavior.

You can't watch your dog if you are reading or talking on a cell phone. If your dog is getting too excited, you may want to take your dog home for the day. You can always come back another time. Even if your dog is playing well with others, interrupt him occasionally and let him settle down for a minute and then let him resume play.

Honor other pet owners' requests about their dogs

Some dogs like to play with every dog they meet; others are more reserved.

If another dog seems uncomfortable with your pooch's rambunctious play style, call your dog away and find another playmate for him. If you are not sure whether both dogs are having fun, separate them for a minute and then let them go. If they both run back together, you can continue to let them play; however, if the other dog moves away, it is time to move your dog to another part of the park.

Choke, prong, or spiked collars should not be used within the park

Your dog could be killed if another dog catches its teeth on your dog's choke, prong, or pinch collar. Your dog could also be seriously injured if he snags his collar on a bench. Instead, use a flat, easily removable collar within the park.

Children must be very closely supervised while in the park

Children must always be accompanied by an adult and kept within "leash length". While most dogs are curious and friendly, not all dogs are child-friendly. Some dogs have strong prey-chasing instincts and may mistake a baby for a small, injured creature. A running, screaming child attracts attention and becomes a target for many dogs. Herding breeds may nip children in an attempt to round them up. Additionally, children are easily

run over and knocked down by running or playful dogs. Don't bring more children and dogs than you can closely supervise. Older children should be taught appropriate dog park behavior. Children should not approach animals they do not know and should never feed any dog within the park. There is a children's playground immediately outside the fenced enclosure. *Please see our handout about children in the dog park.*

Small-dog area

The small-dog area is only for dogs 25 pounds or less. No larger dogs are allowed. You may take your small dog into the large-dog area but be aware that this is very dangerous for your small dog. Small dogs have been severely injured or killed by large dogs in dog parks. *Please see our handout about small dogs in the large dog area.*

Use caution when using toys and other objects to play with your dog

Don't bring your dog's favorite toy from home. Your dog may not want to share this wonderful toy and could become possessive of it. Don't let your children bring their favorite toys, either. Dominance issues may arise which could cause your pet to become unusually aggressive.

Clean up after your dog

You must clean up after your dog. You can help keep the dog park successful by picking up any stray dog deposits that you find anywhere in the park. Even though your dog may not be responsible for the pile this time, you can be sure that you have or will miss cleaning up after your dog on some occasion. If you see someone else's dog leaving a pile, let them know. You'd want someone to do the same for you, and we all need to do our part to keep the park clean. There are bags at the park but these get depleted quickly. If you have extra bags, please bring these and refill our bag containers. Please pickup any stray trash, broken toys, or empty water bottles that you see on the ground.

Dog treats

Small dog treats are permitted in the park; however, never give a treat to another dog without asking the owner. Some dogs have very serious food allergies or may be on very strict diets. Other dogs may become food aggressive.

Food in the park

Even though we have picnic tables inside the dog park, don't bring human

food into the park. You won't be able to enjoy your sandwich with a dozen dogs watching your every move, and you may cause a dog fight. There is a pavilion outside the fenced enclosure where you can enjoy your food before you and your dog enter the park.

Puppies

Puppies less than four months old should not be brought to the Pooch Playground because they usually have not yet received all of their vaccinations and could be exposed to canine diseases for which they have no immunization. There are other safer ways to socialize your puppy until your veterinarian says it is okay to take your puppy to the Pooch Playground.

Please see our handout about puppies in the park.

Water

Eventually, we will have a water fountain and dog washing area in the park. Until then, be sure to bring drinking water for your dog. Please remove any empty water jugs from the park.

Smokers

Please, don't throw cigarette butts on the ground. Some dogs will eat cigarette butts, and the nicotine is very bad for them.

Consider visiting at off-peak times.

Weekends and after-work periods are often very busy, and the large number of dogs may cause stress for your dog on its first visit. It may take a few visits before your dog comes out of its shell.

Vaccinations

All dogs in Franklin County must have rabies vaccinations, but let your veterinarian know that your dog visits a dog park. There are several vaccines specifically designed to protect dogs that are exposed to other dogs. You should talk with your veterinarian about heartworm protection, as well as bordetella, distemper, parvovirus, hepatitis, adenovirus-2, leptospirosis, and parainfluenza vaccinations. Some veterinarians may recommend other vaccines based on what diseases they know to be common to the area. Most vets think topical flea and tick products (like Frontline or Advantage) provide better protection than area spraying. In all cases, work with your vet to determine what your dog needs.

Spaying and neutering

Dogs at the Pooch Playground are not required to be spayed or neutered.

However, unless you intend to breed or show your dog, we highly recommend you do so. Spayed and neutered dogs are usually healthier and less aggressive.

Final thoughts

The dog park is a wonderful place for dogs (and their owners) to exercise and socialize, but it's not right for every dog. There are some dogs that don't belong at the dog park and would be much happier elsewhere.

- Don't bring dogs that are dog or people aggressive.
- Very shy, fearful or reactive dogs are stressed at the dog park and may either become traumatized by all the activity or become aggressive in trying to keep other dogs away. (You can try bringing your shy dog at a time when the park is not busy, but don't try to force him to play if he is clearly uncomfortable.) This dog would probably be much happier with a simple walk around your neighborhood.
- Dogs that are extreme resource guarders think everything in the park belongs to them. They will fight over toys, water bowls, benches, and their owner's attention.
- Older dogs get cranky with the unbounded energy of young, unmannered adolescent dogs. Your senior dogs may be perfectly happy sniffing the new environment, but watch him closely and leave if the younger dogs won't leave him alone.
- These dogs require additional training before they are good dog park candidates:
 - Bullies. They may single out a particular dog for unwanted harassment and be obsessive in their attention. These dogs usually ignore other dogs' body language and don't take turns chasing and being chased.
 - Dogs with extremely poor play styles. They will body slam, nip, corner, aggressively chase, or constantly hump every dog they meet. (Some humping is normal behavior but it should immediately stop if the other dog objects to it.)
 - Dogs with poor social skills. They don't know how to properly greet other dogs, and they don't know how to read another dog's body language. They become overly aroused by play and don't calm down. If they do squabble with another dog, they have poor bite inhibition and often draw blood. Often these dogs have not had regular interaction with other dogs, and may not have been properly socialized as a puppy.

A good dog-park dog should be friendly and outgoing, without being overbearing, obnoxious, or bullying. Your dog should be trained to respond

to your command to "come" or "leave it". If your dog doesn't have the proper skills for the dog park, you can consult with a dog behaviorist or a good trainer to help your dog overcome his problems.