



Etiquette Unleashed!

HELPFUL HINTS FOR DOG PARK HARMONY

Every town council has rules on the Control of Dogs in Public Places. They will all state that the dog needs to be under the control of the person (whether they are from the dog's family or friend or employee etc.) handling the dog when out in public.

It's a good idea to have a plan in place when out and about with your canine buddy. The following points may come in handy!

Essential Equipment

- 🐾 Poo bags – as many as you can carry
- 🐾 Your dog's lead
- 🐾 Treat pouch
- 🐾 Tasty treats
- 🐾 An emergency squeaky toy or ball

You + Your Eyes

If your dog is off lead it is your responsibility to keep an eye on his or her behaviour in public. If your dog is not in your line of sight, you need to be turning and checking every few seconds. A sensible parent who has their toddler out of the stroller would be doing the same. This can also be a life-saving practice as so many dog exercise areas are unfenced – potential traffic accidents abound.

A friend of mine has a Labrador cross who picks up and eats plastic items he finds – stray poo bags are a particular favourite. This dog has had two emergency operations because his person wasn't fast enough to catch him before he'd ingested bags, but was able to get him to the vet quickly enough to save him from life-threatening bowel obstructions.

You + Their Poo

Speaking of poo bags, all councils will also fine you if your dog's waste is left on the ground. You don't have any excuse if you've been following the above point – you can't miss seeing your dog squat if you're doing a good job checking on him or her!

If you genuinely can't find the poo – follow the *Poo Karma Rule* and pick up the first one you see or you will definitely step in it instead. The old soft, smelly, sliding step!

Remember to congratulate your dog for toileting at the park as it never hurts to reinforce this – they are doing exactly what you want and not going in the house!

Poo bags can also be used for other purposes. They are strong enough to hold water for a makeshift bowl if your dog isn't a fan of drinking straight from the tap – just roll it down and hold it resting on the ground. Or for picking up a slobbery ball when it's time to go home. I have also used them to dispose of washed-up blowfish at the river when curious pooches have nearly eaten the poisonous blowies.

You + Their Tasty Treats

A dog park essential, treats that your dog actually values will make your outing more fun and so much easier. The treats are like a **bold underlining** of your intended communication with your dog! Who cares if other dogs prefer you rather than their own people, it's a testament to the scientifically proven method that is reward-based training!

Treats can be used to reinforce appropriate play behaviour (ask your trainer about this) and if necessary, distract them from a possibly dangerous encounter – the easiest way to do this is to train your dog to a hand target. (Another one to learn from your dog trainer!)

You + A Closely Gathered Crowd

I am very wary of joining a large crowd of people and dogs at the park as it can so often erupt easily and end in tears – for the dogs, adults, and children. These groups are often too closely gathered for comfort and the dogs' play is restricted – this always seems to cause the play to escalate and tension between the playmates rises, causing scuffles or fights. Standing around tends to give dogs the impression that they need to jump on you to get your attention – not a good habit to practice, especially in a crowd.

It's far more pleasant to stroll about with your dog and to let them greet their friends nicely – this will also help to ward off potential resource guarding of 'their patch'. Not being stationary can also help if your dog is meeting new dogs, if they aren't getting along it's easier to get away, whereas standing around can be unintentionally confrontational for dogs.

Your Dog + Equable Play

It's wonderful when your dog has a friend he or she can play with where they are both having an equally good time. However, if you are getting the feeling that your dog is giving another a hard time or vice versa, it is safer all round to trust your hunch and call your dog away. An emergency squeaky toy could be useful here in case distraction is needed to get your dog's attention. (NB: be careful with squeakies, because, at best they may make you the Pied Piper of dogs, or could at worst cause squabbles when one or more dogs decide that they'd like a turn with the toy.)

If you are strolling the park and your dog runs rudely at other dogs or just keeps hassling them, continue your walk with your dog on lead. If it's becoming an unpleasant experience altogether, why not come back another time, when neither of you are feeling tense or annoyed, and save the park as a place where you can have fun together.

Care also needs to be taken with playmates of inverse sizes! Although very cute, a Ridgeback and Chihuahua play session will definitely end badly if the Ridgeback accidentally makes a bad choice of paw placement – that's a whole lot of weight potentially bearing down on a tiny body!

Your Dog + Intact Males Or Females

It's never nice for an unsterilised female in heat at the dog park. She will never, ever, ever, ever get a moment's peace. That's all there is to it!

It's important to watch your entire male carefully, as their very presence could inadvertently cause a ruckus – they just seem to have that animal magnetism that gets them in strife!

Your Dog + Their Social Network

Sometimes you need a social network to find out what your friends have been up to. Imagine that Facebook is not made up of your friends' photos and stories but the scents they leave behind. Just delightful! But this is actually how your dog catches up with the latest news, gossip and probably what their friends have been eating – so instead of hurrying them along to keep up with you, why not let them stop and smell the roses (and trees, and poles, and benches etc!)

Check out your dog after it has rained at the park. It's like it was a watercolour painting of scents which has had water thrown at it, creating a crazy new melange of olfactory wonder! They'll be sniffing at all the old spots with renewed interest.

Your Dog + Fun With You

Did you know that you and your dog can make amazing discoveries at the park? When you find these things together you can have a wonderful time congratulating each other! The secret is that you are actually engineering the discovery opportunity – if your dog is busily sniffing somewhere, take one of the tasty treats and squish it against a tree, then call your dog over excitedly, showing them what you've found. Time to celebrate!

This is a great game to enjoy together, reinforcing your dog's recall to you and reminding them how much fun it is to hang out with you. Your trainer will have a heap more ideas you can use to play (and train) at the park.

So use your common sense, keep an eye on your dog and his or her behaviour, be considerate of other park users, and above all, enjoy your outings together!

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