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As the weather gets warmer, we always seem to be looking for new ways to spend time outside. Well, there's no better way for you and your dog to enjoy some fun in the sun than going to your local dog park. With plenty of room to run around, dog parks provide a wonderful place for dogs of all ages, sizes and temperaments to socialize with one another. But are you and your pooch ready for all the dog park pandemonium? Before you head to the puppy playground, make sure that you and your dog know proper dog park etiquette.

For starters, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is your dog fixed and fully vaccinated?
- Does your dog play well with others (humans included)?
 - Is your dog at least a year old?
- Does your dog know basic commands (sit, stay and come)?

If you answer "no" to any of these questions, you should seriously consider postponing your visit to the dog park. When you place destructive dogs and/or adolescent pups in a confined space, trouble often occurs as biting, digging and excessive jumping becomes an issue. But, if both dogs and humans mind their manners, everyone at the dog park will have a fun-filled frolic.

Handy Guidelines for Humans

Remember, as you enter the dog park with your pup in hand, you are responsible for your pet's safety and behavior. To ensure an enjoyable dog park experience, here are a few things you should always do.

Walk the Dog

Before you even go to the dog park, take your dog for a 5–10 minute walk. A quick walk will help them get all that excited energy out of their system before you even enter the dog park. Just watch! After a brief walk, your dog will stay much more calm and relaxed as they engage in some park play.

Collar Check

At most dog parks, certain types of dog collars are not permitted. Because they can cause physical injury during playtime, most choke, prong and spiked collars are not allowed in these off-leash areas. Instead, opt for an **adjustable nylon** or **leather collar**. They even come in a variety of **reflective options**, **bright colors** and distinct designs, so you can keep track of your dog while they run around.

Know the Leash Laws

While most dog parks are off-leash environments, a leash is required before you enter the park itself. Because people and their pets are always coming and going, you should have your pet on either a **snap lead** or **leather leash** from the start. Made with strong yet flexible material, these types of leashes will prevent physical injury should any pets get entwined.

Canine Cleanup

You can help your local dog park stay in fine form by cleaning up after your dog. When left unattended, pet waste can become littered with disease and parasites, which are easily transmittable from dog to dog. That's why you should always carry some **waste bags** and a **pooper scooper** (if you're squeamish) with you to remove any fresh mess with ease.

Pay Close Attention

Don't let yourself get distracted at the dog park. Instead, be aware of what your dog is doing at all times. While they may occasionally run to you for a sip of water or a bit of a break, your dog is going to spend a majority of their time just exploring the area. If you notice your dog displaying any inappropriate behavior, feel free to intervene before things get out of hand.

Article by: Marissa Christiano

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