



Concerning Dog Parks and Free Running Dogs

I like to start out with the disclosure that many of the dogs that I am asked to deal with are often the most troubled. The ones other trainers can't fix, the ones that are at risk of being put down in shelters, the ones that have done some serious damage or are close to doing it. That being said, I would still state that most dogs are good and I merely offer my opinions as advice, sound advice that is, for those who have concerns about their dogs. Remember, it only takes one incident to turn a good dog bad and it's a lot of work to get them back to good. One bad dog can do more damage than a pack of good dogs, and one bad dog can set off a horrible series of events in otherwise good dogs.

Many people like dog parks for the wrong reasons. People constantly feel that their dogs need to play with other dogs and run around and chase each other. They feel this is a good way to get exercise (for their dogs that is) and for social interaction. There are several things wrong with this idea.

1. Dogs are not social animals in the sense that they like to get together with new dogs to hang out and chat. That is a human characteristic, and one that is based on equality. Dogs function on a hierarchical structure. That means that each time a new group of dogs gets together, they will in some way need to establish who belongs where.
2. Exercise, as in the form of walking together is something that establishes the pack and its leaders; therefore it is something that should be done within your pack. That means you and your dog(s). By taking your dog for a walk or a run, you establish yourself as the leader of the pack. People are lazy and think they can take their dogs to the park and then shoot the breeze with all the other lazy people at the park while their dogs run around. Often these people are totally unaware of what is going on with their dogs.

I've been to numerous dog parks and watched oblivious owners chit chatting with each other while their dog is being chased around by a wild pack. The owners think it's cute and often ignore many signs that the dog is actually reaching out for his leaders help. Eventually this dog will grow to disrespect the owner or become a dog that has issues. I've seen and heard the stories that would change anyone's mind as it relates to dog

parks. I can tell you of a lab killing an Akita puppy, countless dogfights, owners getting bitten while trying to break up dogfights and countless dogs that are behaviorally ruined from horrible dog park experiences.

As I said, it only takes one bad dog to set off a pack behavior that cannot be controlled by any person at a dog park. And, when this happens, some dogs are gonna get hurt. When dogs are chasing, their prey drive is set off and they are in *drive mode*. This can be playful for most dogs, but there are those dogs that, once in drive mode, can get very dangerous. These issues are not breed specific, so there are no labels that I'll put on any dogs with respect to breed. Dogs are dogs and these characteristics relate to all breeds across the board.

When a dog enters a dog park his behavior / instinct is to establish himself in the pack. All the dogs that are currently there immediately surround him. The dogs that go to the park regularly have territorial dominance and may or may not express it to a new dog. The new dog may or may not accept it. If he does, it's all good, if not there will be a struggle. Dogs do not communicate like humans do; they base their lives on their rank in the pack. If all the dogs in the park are dogs that your dog knows, and dogs that have a good pack structure there is less likelihood for problems. However, you cannot control who comes to the park and who does not. One bad apple can spoil the whole bunch. One bad dog can spoil the whole pack and one can end up DEAD.

Before I researched this issue, I too would take my dog to the dog park. As I watched the struggles I quickly figured out what I am trying to tell you here. I was, and am capable of breaking up most any dogfight, and have done so on several occasions. I learned quickly that dogs, for the most part are not happy at dog parks, or at the very least can be much happier playing with their own pack or owners without going to the park. I've seen firsthand what I would not want you to see happen to your dog. If a pack of dogs surround your dog and start ripping him apart, you will be incapable of stopping them, believe me. The risk of this happening is worth avoiding the dog park altogether.

In my mind, there is no middle ground on this. Even if the park separates the big dogs and little dogs, it doesn't change anything. All dogs regardless of size have these struggles.

People who don't believe dogs have rank struggles or function on the alpha structure are those who are in total denial, who don't understand anything about dogs or who have never clearly tried to understand the mind of the canine.

The picture below should give you a good example of what can happen to your dog at a dog park. This is not a small dog, but three dogs attacked him and the owner could do nothing to help him. This dog lost one ear for certain and may end up losing the other one as well. This dog is FOREVER disfigured physically and damaged psychologically because people just don't understand the problems with dog parks...

This dog did nothing to instigate the fight and ended up at the receiving end of a nasty fight, all for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Of course the owner thought they were doing the right thing. Look at this picture and understand, that this, or worse can happen to your dog. It will be over in a flash and you will be powerless to do anything about it. Humans are mostly incapable of seeing warning signs before a fight breaks out. If they are capable then for the most part they will not be able to stop the fight once it breaks out.



There are no benefits to taking your dog to a dog park. Your dog does not need to interact with strange dogs in order to be socialized or happy. This is a huge mistake that humans make on dog behavior. If you want to introduce your dog to other dogs, it should be done in a controlled environment. It should be done with another dog whose temperament you are sure of and it should be done in a controlled environment. Dogs will form close bonds with other dogs that they interact with on a regular basis. This can be an asset or a liability. If the dog bonds stronger with the other dog than you, you lose control over the dog. This might sound petty, but it is my opinion that my dog should see me as the source of everything, not another dog. I am his leader, and I have the ability to protect him. The other dog does not have these tools. I am selective on who I introduce my dog to. He does not need to meet other dogs that I don't approve of. My dog is happiest with me and is comfortable in any situation I bring him in to. He is good with any other dog, birds, cats, children and the list goes on. This is because I spent the time with him and did the work to make this happen. When he came to me he was another out of control dog that could not be fixed. I've had several dogs like this and fixed each one of them. I speak from a place of experience... the experience in fixing the ones others could not or would not fix.

In closing I would like to add that these same principles apply to hiking trails, beaches, etc. However dog parks that are closed off or confined are the greatest danger, as the areas are more likely to trigger territorial dominance. When dogs run free, for example on the beach you have no control over their introduction or their interaction, you can't control if one dog will chase the other dog into the street, you are not in control. Yelling doesn't work. People who simply let their dogs run off leash and are unable to recall

their dog with any distractions are an accident waiting to happen. They are irresponsible and cause more damage than good to their own dogs as well as all dogs. They are an accident waiting to happen, and are also the ones who are absolutely clueless on dog behavior. When something happens, they are the ones that just shrug their shoulders.

If you truly love your dog, you will give him the structure that a leader will give. You will train your dog and teach him that the best place to be is with you at your side. Your dog will understand that you control everything that is good in his life and that you will protect him from everything that is bad. You will be a leader of the pack and you will not listen to the stupid things that people say about your dog's need to run free and to *be a dog*. Your dog can run free in a controlled environment. Remember, the shelters are full of dogs that were owned by people who thought dogs should be dogs. They are being killed every minute of every day because of human ignorance. Don't be one of these humans, do it for your dog. Dogs that are properly trained and know their place in the pack are rarely if ever given up by their owners.

I'd like to stress that I have nothing to gain by speaking out against dog parks. I speak out for the dogs that cannot speak for themselves. Please do your homework and see that what I am telling you is true and that it may save your dog's life. It breaks my heart to see dogs suffer for the human emotions, thoughts and responsibilities we put upon them. To see the faces of the animals in the shelter as I walk by their cages, their eyes pleading for a chance at life. If humans only understood the simplicity of the canine mind, thousands of dogs would be saved.

Please visit my animal rescue organization and consider supporting our important work:
<http://www.boundangels.org>

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