Dog Park Information

We are very fortunate in our area to have a number of dog parks for dogs to enjoy. A good resource for finding them is www.metropets.org. We have found many dogs who really enjoy dog parks, but you do need to keep your dog's individual personality, size and breed characteristics in mind as you contemplate taking your new pup to a dog park.

Does your dog REALLY enjoy playing with a variety of other dogs, including multiple dogs at one time?
Different breeds and types of dogs play differently. Two Labrador Retrievers will play very differently than two Cocker Spaniels. Sometimes different breeds of dog play very well together and other times their play is incompatible. Bully breeds tend to enjoy body slamming; Poodles however, may take offense at that type of play. Some dogs enjoy back and forth chase games, others like to roughhouse.

Many adult dogs don't enjoy dog parks. In human terms, young children and adolescents tend to make friends quickly and easily. Mature adults are often more selective about who they spend time with and the activities they choose to take part in. For adult dogs, going to the dog park might be akin to a 45 year old person spending their free time at the elementary school playground

It can take only one bad experience to turn a social dog into a fearful dog. Conversely, rude behavior is quickly learned. Impolite dogs can be a bad influence on well-socialized dogs. You have no control over the "pack" that hangs out at the dog park, as they are not your dogs.

Will your small dog be safe at a dog park?
Small dogs, generally considered to be less than 20lbs, are not appropriate for dog parks unless there is an enclosed section especially for them. Unfortunately, because of their size, they may be intimidated, bullied, trampled and possibly seen as prey. Sadly, there are cases where dogs have become aroused in their play and attacked smaller dogs. If you have a small dog, consider how scary it must feel to have to stand up to a group of dogs that are overwhelmingly larger and stronger. Jack Russell Terriers are an exception to the small dog rule. They tend to have enough tenacity to hold their own at the dog park!

Does your dog come when called? Will you be able to "catch" him at a dog park?
Dogs who attend dog parks should have some basic manners training. A good recall is most important - to call your dog to you if unacceptable behavior breaks out and when it is time to leave the dog park. You should be able to gain control of your dog's behavior at any moment.

Is the dog park a good place to take a dog with behavioral issues?
A dog with special behavioral needs will not benefit from visits to the dog park. In fact, dog parks potentially make a behavior problem worse. The dog park is not the place to make your fearful dog more outgoing, your aggressive dog more friendly, or your reactive dog less reactive. A controlled environment is the place to deal with behavior issues and a dog park is usually anything but controlled.

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Will the dog park be a good place to socialize your young dog?
Socializing your puppy is important. However, for many of the reasons already stated, dog parks are not the place to fulfill this need. Additionally, there is no way to be sure that other owners have vaccinated their dog so you could be unintentionally exposing your pup to illnesses and diseases at a time in your dog's life when he is most vulnerable.

Dog Park Alternatives

Your dog needs your companionship and an outlet for his energy. Be creative with your dog's exercise outlets. Many people enjoy dog parks because they invite conversation between other dog owners in the community. It is an enjoyable social event for the human attendees!

Look for ways to combine the social aspects of dog parks for both you and your dog:

Form a group with friends and neighbors who have dogs. Schedule a time to walk your dogs together. During the walk your dogs can get to know each other without being forced to interact. Take this opportunity to do your socializing. You'll also get more exercise than you would just standing at the dog park! Post the form below on bulletin boards in your community.

Take your dog to a basic manners class. Over the multi-week course you will form a closer bond with your dog. Your dog will learn positive behaviors in the company of other dogs. You might also be delighted to find you've made a few friends as you progressed together through the class!

After your basic manners class, consider a "dog sport" class. Agility, Rally-O (an obedience obstacle course), and Canine Freestyle (dancing with your dog) are popular and commonly available classes. You don't have to intend to compete to take theses classes.

Check out your dog's breed club in your area. Many hold get-togethers and activities specific to the breed. For example, sighthound clubs often hold lure coursing events and small terrier groups offer earth dog events.

If you have a puppy, look for a dog training center that holds "Puppy Parties" and "Puppy Kindergarten." Take the time to find a reputable training center. Local shelters, vets, and trusted friends can often refer you to a trainer or training center. The Association of Pet Dog Trainers (www.apdt.com) also provides a list of its members. In your search, visit the training centers to observe classes, ask for references, and find out what training their employees receive.