

How you and your dog can become **Good Dog Park Citizens**

by Anne Lippert, NADOI Dog Trainer

It is essential to your dog's balance and mental health to continue to socialize him throughout his lifetime. Socialization means training your dog to meet and get along with unfamiliar dogs and people. Dog parks are great for this as your dog will meet and play with several different dogs.

The first couple of visits to the dog park may be a little scary for your dog. It is OK for him to seek assurance from you. But, try not to unintentionally reinforce needy behavior by soothing or petting your dog. Let him progress away from you in his own good time. He may just want to sit and watch.

On the other hand, your dog may be lacking in social skills and not know how to approach another dog to play. This is the dog that rushes up to another dog and gets in his face quickly. Many dogs resent such a rowdy and rude approach. You may want to walk your dog around for a while on leash **OUTSIDE THE OFF-LEASH AREA** until he calms down and becomes accustomed to all the action.

A few rules that everyone follows will make your trip to the park an enjoyable outing for you and your dog. Implicit in the proceeding paragraph is the assumption you are watching your dog as he interacts with the other dogs. The dog park is **NOT** the place to catch up on your reading or phone calls.

- You need to know when and where your dog pooped so you can clean it up.
- You need to know if your dog is getting over stimulated, overtired or overheated so you can impose a time out or rest period.
- You need to know when your dog is digging a hole so you can fill it up.

Here are a few more things to consider that will enhance your time in the park.

1. Have your dog on leash as you enter and as you leave the park. Immediately take your dog off leash in the double-gated entry area. Some dogs can feel threatened if they are leashed while other dogs are not. **Keep your leash in your hand.**
2. **Children are at risk in an area reserved for loose dogs.** Children have a tendency to run and scream when excited, thereby arousing the dogs' natural instinct to chase. For this reason, infants and children under the age of 12 should not be in the park.
3. Little treats for training purposes are OK if you are in the park alone. Chew toys (including sticks), rawhides, play toys, etc are not OK. Some dogs can get quite territorial over such items, and fights can break out. Also, humans should not eat in the park for obvious reasons.
4. If any dog becomes disruptive or aggressive, the owner needs to remove the dog from the park.
5. When you bring your dog to play, be sure that he is wearing a close fitting buckle collar. Chain collars, and loose fitting collars can easily get caught in another dog's mouth causing panic for humans and dogs – and can result in serious injury.

Remember, your primary goal in coming to the dog park is to socialize your dog so that he maintains good manners. We humans should practice what we preach, and always be considerate of others. That way, your dog park will be an enjoyable, healthy, educational experience for you and your dog.

What is NADOI? Anne Lippert is a member of NADOI – The National Association of Dog Obedience Instructors – a professional organization of dog trainers, the oldest of its kind. It requires its applicants to demonstrate proficiency in their craft, as tested and measured by their peers, before membership is granted. When you go to a NADOI member for training, you are going to someone who has years of experience AND expertise training dogs and working with their owners. For more information about NADOI visit their website at NADOI.org Anne Lippert provides training at her facility in Eustis, Florida on a hill overlooking beautiful Lake Dalhousie. She can be reached at Puppy Preschool at 352-483-3374 or by email at anneeustis@aol.com