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*Spring/Summer
Gear Guide*

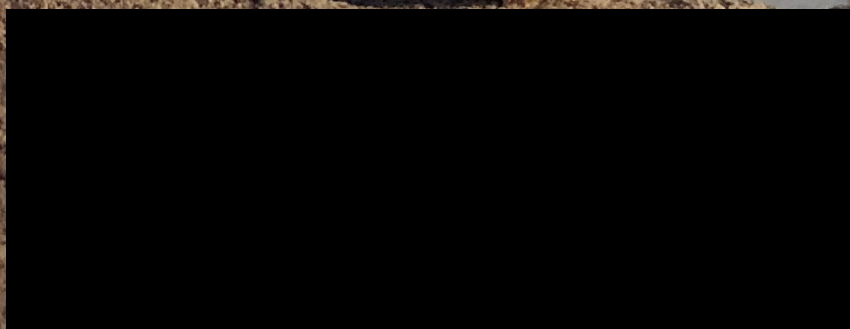
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Straddling the Fence on Dog Parks?

No-nonsense tips to tell if four-paw playgrounds are right for your dog

It was the kind of crisp, cool day where everyone wanted to be outside with their dogs, and the dog park was buzzing. Daisy, a 25-pound red Miniature American Shepherd with a white face and captivating blue eyes, arrived at the park with her owners, a young couple who clearly loved their dog.

The trio stepped inside the fence, and Daisy was told, “Go play.” Ten feet away, six large dogs formed a tight, physically close group that lunged, spun, barked, air-snapped, and moved together with great intensity. This pack included a Dalmatian, a German

Shepherd Dog, and four large mixed breeds. Two of the owners of these dogs were close by, but the other four were some distance away, talking or typing on their cell phones and paying no attention to the dogs.

Daisy took three slow steps toward the group, quickly retreated, and plastered herself to her owner’s leg.

“Daisy, go play,” said one of her owners. Once again, Daisy took a few steps forward and came back to lean on her owner’s leg, her body quivering.

Then a good thing happened. One of Daisy’s owners knew how to read his dog and exhibited a healthy dose of good sense.

“Daisy, let’s go down here,” he said as he led her to the far end of the fenced area where there were no dogs. He didn’t pressure her to do anything. Within a few minutes, a lone medium-sized dog approached and initiated play. Daisy joined the games and soon appeared relaxed and eager to run and play.

GROUNDS FOR CONTROVERSY

The dog park movement began in 1979 when Ohlone Dog Park, the first in the United States, was created as an experiment in Berkeley, California, according to a 2007 paper from the University of Pennsylvania. Today, there

Change of View

For those dog owners who want to meet new human friends while providing their dogs with exercise, the AKC offers excellent alternatives to dog parks. Popular activities such as Fast CAT and agility improve canine fitness and build a community of fellow dog trainers. The new AKC FIT DOG program offers several titles for activities that mix fun and fitness, from basic walks to agility and parkour.

For the good manners your dog needs for group activities, check out the Canine Good Citizen program. Learn about one team's experience and how CGC helped open many doors for them (see page 7).

To learn more, visit akc.org and akc.org/sports/akc-family-dog-program/akc-fit-dog.

are thousands of dog parks across the country.

They have been identified as the most frequented locations for providing outdoor activity and socialization for dogs. The main benefits cited by owners include improving the dog's physical well-being and providing an opportunity for dog owners to socialize with other owners, according to a 2009 study published in *Landscape and Urban Planning*.

As with anything else, there are pros and cons, with exercise and socializing

for both canines and humans as significant draws. Another benefit is that they reduce the number of dogs running loose in other parts of the park.

Aggressive incidents top the list of cons. In a 2022 survey published on the website Sniffspot, 15 percent of dog owners reported their dogs had been attacked at a dog park. In addition to injuries, even minor attacks can contribute to extreme shyness or reactivity. Lawsuits have been aimed at the owner of a dog who attacks or the city that oversees the park. Even

when dogs are not being aggressive, there is a potential for injuries from rough play.

"It was fun until my dog needed surgery," noted one owner when talking about the local canine gathering place.

Other negative outcomes can be parasites and illnesses. In a 2020 study of dog parks from 30 metropolitan areas across the United States, intestinal parasites were found in 20 percent of dogs and an astounding 85 percent of dog parks. The parasites included *Giardia*, *Ancylostoma caninum*, and *Trichuris vulpis*.

Finally, irresponsible dog owners are a big problem. Many owners are on cell phones and are not close enough to their dogs to intervene if there is an incident. Some owners don't clean up after their dogs, they allow their dogs to bully others, or they bring in inappropriate dogs, such as frail seniors or puppies.

GO OR NO?

To decide if dog parks are appropriate for your dog, start by looking at the fencing and gates to determine that they are secure. Is it well-maintained, and are owners cleaning up after their dogs? Are owners ready to stop potentially dangerous play if there are very active dogs? Drinking water should be available, and small dogs should have their own area. A set of rules posted at the entry can set expectations for everyone. Ask yourself (be honest!) if your dog is under control and a good candidate for the dog park. The questions aren't just about dogs. Do you have the social skills to give feedback to the owners whose dog is causing a problem?

Daisy was one lucky dog. She had an attentive owner who observed carefully and quickly intervened when necessary to ensure that the dog park visit was fun for both Daisy and her family. **FD**

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