

A Handbook of Useful Tips for Dog Owners

This material has been compiled from information found in various books and online sources (see [Bibliography](#)). The Hollenback Dog Park Rules are listed for clarity purposes to support safe use of the Wilkes-Barre off-leash City Dog Park. **USE THIS INFORMATION AT YOUR OWN DISCRETION. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE AND LIABLE FOR YOUR OWN DOG'S ACTIONS.**

The Wyoming Valley Dog Owners Group

WVDOG is a group of dog owners who advocate for the education of dog owners to be accountable for the behavior of their dogs at the W-B off-leash dog park. Our goal is to help make the dog park a safe and enjoyable experience for dogs and their owners.

It is important for all dog owners who use the off-leash dog park to know that they assume full responsibility for their dog's behavior and they use the dog park at their own risk. You are responsible for damage and/or injury inflicted by your dog(s).

The purpose of this document is to provide you with information that may be useful in making your dog park experience positive and enjoyable. This information is a compilation of information taken from various sources (see Bibliography).

You are expected to use your best judgment as to when it is safe to intervene and when it isn't. This is true in both human and canine interactions.

Hollenback Dog Park Rules

- **USE AT YOUR OWN RISK** Owners are legally responsible for the actions and behavior of their dog (S) at all times.
- Dog waste must be picked up **IMMEDIATELY** by the dog owners . Dog waste bags are available at the entrance of each yard.
- Owners must be within dog park and supervising their dog(s) at all times with leash readily available.
- Limit 4 dogs per handler per visit
- All children under the age of 13 must be accompanied by an adult. This park is not for toddlers or small children.
- All food and treats are not allowed inside the dog park.
- Dogs must remain leashed at all times when outside the park.
- Remove pinch or choke collars and leash in off leash area.
- Leash up and leave if your dog is acting aggressively or having a bad day.
- Dog s in heat or puppies under 4 mo of age are not allowed.
- All dogs must wear a collar with a current rabies tag, license and identification. All dogs need to be vaccinated and licensed.

- **Don't bring a dog with contagious conditions or illness to the park.**
- **You are responsible for damages or injury inflicted by your dog(s)**
- **Do not let your dog dig holes or damage park plants or property.**
- **Smoking is not allowed in off leash area.**

For more information, see our [Dog Park Rules page](#).

Dog Play

Whenever a new dog enters a dog park certain behaviors will typically occur. Initially, there may be an increase in activity, noise and sniffing. Eventually, with mounting, wrestling, possession claiming, posturing, and vocalizing, ranking orders are adjusted to make room for the newcomer. Some canines enter this group as lowly underdogs, and others come in like leaders of the pack, moving up fast in rank. Spend some time observing dogs playing together including your own. Dogs may have different playing styles based on size, breed and temperament.

Dog mounting can cause the less animal-experienced owner great embarrassment or annoyance but is a perfectly natural mode of canine interaction. Dogs may mount one another for amorous reasons, regardless of gender, especially during adolescence (anywhere from 4 months to 2 years of age), regardless of sex or being neutered. Most of the time mounting behavior occurs between adult dogs to establish dominance; a dog that assumes the mounting posture is informing the 'underdog' clearly that it is subordinate in rank. When the mounted dog tolerates the other's behavior it is yielding to the dominating dog's higher rank. This is a much ritualized mode of canine interaction that helps dogs to establish ranking order without violence.

Dog-to-dog interactions follow rules of etiquette that make perfect sense to the dogs. Inexperienced dogs and young puppies can be overwhelmed, terrified, or traumatized by suddenly finding themselves in the middle of a canine melee.

Dogs that roll on their back are signaling that they are withdrawing from active, solicitous interaction. If their limbs and tail are flaccid and their neck is fully exposed, they may invite/tolerate more passive interaction (e.g. sniffing, petting) from others. If they tuck their tail and put their paws over their chest and groin, they do not wish to interact, period.

A normal dog recognizes this and withdraws, not because the first dog "submits" to them, but because they are capable of responding appropriately to the signals.

Owners with timid, overwhelmed or fearful dogs should introduce their dog gradually to the park by:

- Take dog to a less crowded area of the park or the small dog area.
- Visit the park when it is less crowded. Early mornings usually are much less crowded than prime times like Saturday and Sunday afternoon.

Special steps should be taken if a dog is behaving defensively, running to its owner for protection or behaving in a defensively aggressive manner. Advise owners to be careful not to pick the dog up unless it is the only recourse and the dog truly is in danger. A panicked pet picked up by its owner may bite accidentally. The owner is also undermining the dog's confidence—giving the dog the message that he can't handle the other dogs.

Rough Play

Dogs have different play styles. Rough play is only allowed if consensual and both dogs are having fun. Owners are responsible for their dog's behavior. If a dog is playing too rough or behaving in an aggressive manner, ask the owner to step in and control their pet. They may need to move to another area of the park or leash him or her and leave the park. Rough play and chasing is not acceptable if any of the dogs involved are not enjoying it.

Recognize Appropriate Play

During play it is normal and appropriate for dogs and puppies to:

- Bark
- Growl
- Wrestle
- Chase
- Mouth
- Paw
- Bow
- Butt swing
- Tug on toys
- Mount (may not be tolerated by all dogs and the dog should dismount if asked)
- Yelp (the other dog should immediately back off)

Recognize inappropriate behavior:

Request that owners intervene when:

- More than one dog picking on another (pack behavior)
- Bullying (dogs do not trade roles during play)
 - Charging
 - Snarling
 - Snapping
 - Not letting dog get up or get away
 - Body slamming
- Chasing without letting the other dog rest
- Cornering or crowding another dog (especially when done by a pack)
- Signs of Stress
 - Cowering, hiding or trying to leave
 - Lowering head
 - Putting ears back
 - Yawning
 - Raising hackles

Dog Park Fighting

Dogs can be bullies, competitive over resources, socially uncomfortable or defensive. Male dogs are statistically at much higher risk to tangle with other males (although this statistic includes intact dogs, the risk for a neutered male is much lower). This mix can make for regular excitement at dog parks! The solution lies in owner constant observation, surveillance and intervention.

If dogs play well usually but seem to target certain dogs for bullying, they can be given a time-out for their bullying behavior. If dogs are strong resource guarders, this can be ascertained and managed. If dogs are under-socialized, their confidence can be gradually built up with careful planning.

There always is the risk that two or more dogs will engage in a serious, possibly injury-causing fight. Injury can happen at any time, especially when dogs are engaging in rough-and-tumble play together. Redirecting a dog's attention at exactly the right moment can make all the difference. The tone of voice and body language can also make a big difference in preventing a dogfight. Advise owners to keep calm and don't reinforce fearful or aggressive behavior by soothing the dog with petting or cooing sounds. Try to keep the owners moving around the park to help break up dog packing behaviors.

Every dog (regardless of parentage, pedigree or personality) possesses the full repertoire of normal canine behavior:

- Growling
- Barking
- Snarling
- Snapping
- Biting

All of the above are normal canine behaviors and are an integral part of canine communications.

The breed or gender of the dog is no guarantee that dogs will or will not fight. As a general rule of thumb, females usually fight females, and males usually fight males. All dogs don't (and won't) get along. Dogs can be just like people in that they may just not like a particular dog ... no reason, "I just don't like you." And other dogs may hold a grudge (just like some people do).

The only difference between individual dogs and the larger group of individual breeds is the readiness with which various behaviors can be triggered and the extent to which a dog will carry his aggression.

Dogs created to guard (for example: Chows, Akitas) or fight (for example: Pit Bulls, American Staffordshire Terriers, etc.) may be more quickly triggered to act in aggressive ways than a dog bred to work as a bird dog or as a lap dog, but this is no guarantee that a dog will not fight.

Most dogs (with the exception of dogs bred for fighting and the rare individual) don't enjoy arguments, altercations or fisticuffs any more than the average human being does. Being angry, defensive or afraid are not enjoyable for the canine either.

Prevention - the 4Ps Warning Signs

- **Posture:** A dog's body language can communicate fear, hostility or submission.
- **Packing:** More than 4 or 5 dogs packed together can lead to trouble. Break it up by asking owners to lead their dogs to other places in the park (at least 30 feet away).
- **Possession:** It may be the owner, a ball or a treat but most dogs will protect what is theirs.
- **Provoking:** If a dog is continuously annoying another dog or dogs or provoking attention ask owner to remove the dog.

Reasons for Aggression:

- Fear
- Pain
- Irritation
- Anger
- Protection of territory (toys, food, people)
- Protection of family
- Self defense
- Protection of possessions and resources (toys and food)
- Sexual conflict
- Social Status
- Hunger
- Disease, biochemical or psychological

The easiest way to handle a dog fight is to prevent it. Learn to read dog language and posture.

Immediately separate dogs who project fighting posture. Separate means to remove both dogs from the area. A 'time out' or 'cooling off' period may be in order.

Ways Dogs Communicate that Something is Going Awry:

- Body posture—squaring off, freezing, stiffening
- Speed and direction for head and eye movements
- Position of ears, tail and whiskers
- Ears pointing forwards
- A stiff tail held up high may be wagging (not always a friendly sign.)
- Alteration of breathing pattern (may be subtle)
- Hair or hackles raised
- Expression of eyes—hard, staring expression
- Angle of head
- Lifting lip, growling, snarling
- Dogs feeling threatened or closed to social interaction tuck all of their limbs over their chest and belly

The speed of warning signals and the progression from mild irritation to more serious phases can vary greatly. Just as some humans have a very long fuse there are others that will react like a grenade with a pin pulled.

Dogs that disagree with each other usually bark, growl or snap, and almost never make contact. When they do, there is usually a nick on an ear or the top of the head or shoulders. Hanging or biting on the neck is **not** normal dog to dog behavior. They are behaviors that are associated with predatory events.

Fight Prevention - What Owners Can Do:

- Pay attention to your dog. Be aware of where he is and what he is doing at all times
- Stay close enough to control or protect your dog in the face of potential fight.
- Keep a collar on your dog at all times so you have something to grab if needed.
- Keep walking. Walking defuses defensive behaviors and helps keep the area neutral territory. Avoid the temptation to stand around and chat or sit in one place for very long. When folks congregate, many dogs may become protective of their people and their space, making scuffles more likely to occur.
- Leave the park. Some days it's just a bad mix. Go for a walk or come back later. Trust your instincts! If it doesn't feel right—leave.
- If your dog is constantly involved in fighting evaluate if the park is appropriate for your dog. A trip back to obedience school may be in order.

Fights:

- Never, ever reach your hands into the middle of a dog fight.
- Distract and divert. A loud whistle, blast of water might work. Throw a coat, blanket, etc., to startle the dogs
- Advise all other owners to leash their dogs and move away from the fight
- Maintain a cool head. Yelling and getting upset will only add to the frenzy.
- If any dogs are hurt advise exchange of contact info. Each party is responsible for damages or injury caused by their dog.
- Once a fight occurs, the adrenaline levels of the dogs involved, and many of those who witnessed the fight, will be raised for several hours. It is wise to take these dogs out of the park and exercise them elsewhere to avoid the potential of another fight.

Breaking up a Dog Fight

These tips are from Ed Frawley from his web article "How to Break up a Dog Fight Safely". You are under no obligation to use any of these techniques or to break up a fight. Dog fights are very dangerous to try to break up. You may be hurt, so it is totally up to you the degree that they want to be involved. If you choose to do so, then this is a technique that will work with minimal damage to the humans or dogs.

NOTE:

Never, ever, rush in and try to grab the dogs to pull them apart. Their adrenaline is pumping and they will bite anything and anyone, including you.

1. Take control of the situation. Keep your cool. Tell all other owners to leash their dogs and move out of the way. Tell screamers to be quiet (they are just making the situation worst). The owners will need to grab their leashes.
2. If possible, try to coach the owners of the fighting dogs to do this:
3. The safest way to break up a dogfight requires 2 people. Each person (hopefully the owners) grabs the back feet of their dogs. The dog is picked up like a wheelbarrow. With the legs up, both dogs are then pulled apart. Once they break apart, it is critical that the people do not release the dogs or the fight will begin again. They need to start turning in a circle, or slowly swinging the dogs in a circle while they back away from the other dog. This stops the dog from curling and coming back and biting the person holding their legs.

By circling the dog, the dog has to sidestep with its front feet or it will fall on its chin. As long as you slowly continue to back and circle, the dog cannot do any damage to you. To insure that the fight will not happen continue, the owners must leash their dogs and leave the park. They need to exchange contact information. If a person is bitten, they are required by law to report it to Sequim Police Dept. Control. You can call 9-1-1 to report.

First Aid for Dogs and Humans

Dog Fights/Bite Wounds:

It is recommended that owners take dogs to their vet. Bite wounds are often more serious than they appear because the damage on the surface of the skin is usually less severe than the injury to underlying tissue. The muscle under the skin is often bruised, crushed or torn and the wound can be extremely painful. Bite wounds often become infected.

Human bite wounds should always go to the emergency room or their family doctor.

Other Dangers in the Park

Heat Stroke/Exhaustion

Heat stroke is a common occurrence during the hot months of the year. Dogs are prone to overheating because they do not sweat. Other factors such as obesity, advanced age or infancy can also make a dog more vulnerable to heat.

Symptoms (some or all may be present)

- Panting
- Weakness or collapse
- Vomiting and or diarrhea
- Seizures

Cool the dog down immediately by soaking with water (use a piece of clothing in the dog watering facility to wet the dog down if nothing else is available). Transport to emergency hospital immediately.

Prevention

Wet your dog down periodically. Offer water frequently. Dogs at risk should not use the park during the heat of the day.

Bug/Bee bites/stings

If a dog suddenly starts clawing at their face or drooling excessively they may have been bit or stung. The owner should contact their vet in case of an anaphylactic reaction.

Dog Body Language 101

Signs of a happy, content dog

- Head up or in a normal position
- Tail relaxed/wagging (full range of motion)
- “Grin” on face (mouth open with corners of the mouth wrinkled)
- Ears in relaxed/normal position
- Able to sleep/eat
- Playing with or chewing on toys
- Eyes move freely (not focused on any one subject for more than a few seconds)

Signs of a fearful or stressed dog

- Head down/head low (may be turned away from other dogs/people)
- Tail low or tucked between legs (may wag weakly)
- Mouth closed/may see wrinkles at corners of mouth
- Ears held back/low (if tall ears, they may stick out to the sides or be folded against the head)
- May roll on his back with belly exposed
- May urinate while crouching or on his back
- May “freeze” and be stiff all over; glassy eyes or will show body tension and stiff movements
- May try to run away (usually with tail tucked and head low)
- May growl, snap, show teeth, or whine
- May repeatedly bark with a short, high-pitched yap or yelp
- May be constantly moving, restless, or have decreased activity levels
- Won’t sleep or rest
- May try to hide in or behind things
- Quick yawning (looks nervous, not tired)
- Excessive drooling, “ropes”
- Trembling
- Feet sweaty (leaves paw prints that evaporate quickly)
- Disinterested in food
- Shallow or rapid breathing
- Excessive and/or sudden hair loss
- White rim of eyes showing more than usual
- Muscle ridge visible around the eyes or mouth
- May show calming signals like lip licking, ground sniffing, shaking (like when wet) or scratching (like he has an itch)

Signs of a yielding dog

- May try to lick the face or mouth of a more assertive dog
 - May paw gently at the face of a more assertive dog
 - Head down/low (may be turned away from assertive dog/person)
 - Tail low/tucked (may wag weakly)
 - Ears held back/low
 - May roll on his back with belly exposed
 - May urinate while crouching or on his back (common for puppies)
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- **Dog Park Guidelines** Pet Behavior Help, www.petbehaviorhelp.com
- **Deb Thompson, Cary, NC Dog Park** (SPECIAL THANKS for her work on the original document that inspired this web page.)
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