

# THE PROBLEM WITH PARKS ( Dog Parks that is...)

As I drove down a road that I frequent often, I pass yet again the popular designated area that dog folk go to gossip and meet up while allowing their dogs off leash with out the hassle of being harassed by local animal control officers. The only "legal" place your dog may be allowed to be a dog. I drive past for the 10th time this week alone. I drive down to the other end of town to a quiet part of the beach and look around to make sure not a single dog is anywhere near. I don't do this because I have a bad dog, on the contrary I do this because I have a GREAT dog. A very social, friendly and well mannered dog. So why you wonder would I not bring him to a dog park and let him play with others of his own kind. Well quite simply because I want him to stay a GREAT dog.

## Why I do not condone dog parks

Sadly these parks are used by the less experienced of dog owners. Those that do not understand canine language and interaction, those that have little responsibility for their own dogs, those that are busy, pre-occupied, socialites who only seek to benefit from their own social outing than that of their dogs. Dog parks are a place to show off their dogs or at the

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very least to show off what great doggy parents they are by bringing their dogs to the dog parks. Now if these people want to show off their parenting skills, then why don't they concentrate on how well their dogs behave or how mannerly their dogs are or how well they pay attention to what they are doing.

Let's put it in perspective a little. If these dog parents were actual human parents at a park would they let their little humans run around humping other kids, or pull other kids around by their ears or chase smaller humans around until they are so beside themselves that the very mention of going to a park again puts the living fear of Jesus into them. Have these parents ever heard of BULLYING! Do you remember the age when children go through a biting stage? We certainly do not encourage it or at least we try and find out what caused it. They usually 'pick' it up from another child and the phase usually passes quickly. We surely do not put children in an environment which encourages this type of behaviour.

Seriously do you think the little gagging Bichon at the end of the leash trying to crawl up your pant leg is having a good

time being harassed by the Labrador puppy? How about the dog that is being chased around by a gang of adolescent pups about twice the size of the victim is he having a good time?

Here is the thing. Why would you want to purposely encourage behaviours that are not acceptable outside the dog park. Barking, chasing, biting, prey drive, stalking, marking, jumping are all things we want to stop or at least that's what I am told when I go to people's houses. So if these are things that I do not want in my everyday life why would I think it was okay to let my dog do these things SOME of the time.

These things are all ok for puppies up until the age of about 16 weeks. After that time it's time for baby to start acting like a well respected member of the community. You must be thinking that my dogs live a pretty sad and boring life. Not exactly. My dogs play, hang out, drive in cars, go to the beach, play with other dogs, play fetch, play ball, chase rabbits and are model citizens but they do this in a controlled and mannerly fashion. They are not allowed to harass other dogs, they are always reminded to play nice, they are never allowed to bark incessantly or simply just because. They are not allowed to hump "just because they're dogs" They aren't allowed pick on other dogs or to bully their friends. They do know what timeouts are, how to lay down and stay when they have over stepped their boundaries. They can and do remain calm even when playing. We never encourage nor allow them to become 'over - stimulated' or out of control. Basically it comes down to this; how well mannered do you believe your dog should be. Dogs are no longer considered pack animals, they develop family unites just the same as we do. So the "need" to hang out with and socialize with strangers is not as necessary as we had originally thought. They need to learn social skills, yes, but they aren't exactly going to grow up, leave home and get a job. We are their family unit and as long as they learn and understand what is acceptable for us and they learn the family 'language' then they are as happy as they can be.

Erika Phillips



A student of Animal Behavior/ Nutrition and Alternative Medicine since 1990. She has studied at Guelph University in Canada, Glasgow University in Scotland and attended the British institute of Homeopathy. Erika has bred, raised and competed with many breeds of dogs in all aspects of dog sport. She currently consults on Animal Nutrition, Animal Behaviour and Alternative Health , including herbs and homeopathy and owns The Controversial Canine. She currently resides in Ontario, Canada.