

A Handbook of Useful Tips for Dog Owners

Useful Tips for Dog Owners

DISCLAIMER: This material was been compiled from information found in various books and online sources (see Bibliography). The Sequim Dog Park Rules are listed for clarity purposes to support safe use of the Sequim off-leash City Dog Park. Names, addresses, and phone numbers of local medical and veterinarian services are listed for convenient reference purposes only. None of these listed parties are in any way connected with the information printed herein or necessarily agree with the information printed herein. USE THIS INFORMATION AT YOUR OWN DISCRETION. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE AND LIABLE FOR YOUR OWN DOG'S ACTIONS.

Useful Tips for Dog Owners

The Sequim Dog Park Pals are a loosely organized group of dog owners who advocate for the education of dog owners to be accountable for the behavior of their dogs at the Sequim 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. If you feel threatened, contact the Sequim police department at 360-683-7227 or dial 9-1-1.

Sequim Dog Park Rules:

- Use this park at your own risk.
- This park is not for toddlers or small children.
- You are responsible for damage or injury inflicted by your dog(s).
- Leave all food, treats and special toys at home or bring at your own risk.
- Enter through the double-gate entry. Unleash your dog in the holding area; then open the inside gate and walk into the leash-free area.
- Please remove pinch or choke collars in off-leash areas.
- Keep your eye on your dog and never leave your dog unattended.
- Leash-up and leave if your dog is acting aggressively or having a bad day.
- Keep all puppies younger than 4 months out of the off-leash dog park.
- Always clean up after your dog. Bag and dispose pet waste in the containers provided.
- Female dogs in heat are not allowed in off-leash areas.
- Dogs need to be vaccinated and licensed. (Contact the City of Sequim for license)
- Don't bring a dog with contagious conditions or illnesses to the park.
- Do not let your dog dig holes or damage park plants and property.
- Smoking is not allowed in the off-leash area.
- Always keep your dog on a leash outside the designated off-leash area.

Police Enforcement:

Off-leash dog parks are generally self-supervised. Visitors to the parks are encouraged to follow the rules and to encourage others to follow the rules. If there is a problem that's beyond the capacity of visitors to manage, the Sequim City Police should be called at 360-683-7227. For emergencies, call 9-1-1.

Fines for off-leash, license and scooping violations range from \$50 to \$100.

Children in the Dog Park:

Reasons why it isn't safe for children to be in the dog park:

- Not all dogs are socialized with children.
- Some dogs see children (with their quick movements and small size) as prey. A child running may be seen as prey.

Useful Tips for Dog Owners

- Some herding dogs will attempt to herd your child. The dog may naturally herd with small nips to the back of legs.
- Your dog may become territorial over your child. Other dogs may also become territorial over your child. This can cause a fight that could injure or scare your child.
- When dogs are playing, they naturally mouth, mount and may body slam. A dog may mistake your child for another playmate.
- The dog park can be quite overwhelming to children.
- A dog fight can occur which could put your child in a dangerous situation.

Advice for Entering the Dog Park:

- Do not open the outside gate if the inside gate is open. One family of dogs at a time in the inside enclosure (between the double gates) at a time.
- Remove dogs leash inside the double gated area. Make sure the gate is closed after entering the park.
- Do NOT leave a leash on dogs in park. This can actually cause an altercation as a dog may feel restricted in its ability to protect itself. Also, dogs feel more protective of their owners when leashed. DO carry your leash into the park in case you need to remove your dog in an emergency situation.
- Do not to bring any toys that a dog may be particularly attached to. These items may provoke possessive or aggressive behavior or may be destroyed through rough play.
- When new dogs enter the facility it can get really congested at the gate area, so move your dogs away, giving the new dogs a chance to get acclimated.

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.

Useful Tips for Dog Owners

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

Useful Tips for Dog Owners

- 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.

Useful Tips for Dog Owners

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:

Useful Tips for Dog Owners

- 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.

Useful Tips for Dog Owners

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.

The closest Hospitals are:

Primary Health Care Urgent Care

520 N. Fifth Ave.
Sequim, WA 98382
Phone: 360-582-1200
Hours: Mon – Sat 9a-8p (closed Thur & Sun)

Jefferson General Hospital

834 Sheridan Avenue
Port Townsend, WA
Phone: 360-385-2200

Olympic Medical Center

939 Caroline
Port Angeles, WA 98362
Phone: 360-417-7705

Clinicare of Port Angeles, Inc

621 E Front St.
Port Angeles, WA 98362
Phone: 360-452-5000

The closest Veterinary Hospitals are:

Greywolf Veterinary Hospital

1102 E Washington St.
Sequim, WA
Phone: 360-683-2106

Pacific Northwest Veterinary Hospital

289 W Bell St.
Sequim, WA
Phone: 360-681-3368

Useful Tips for Dog Owners

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

Useful Tips for Dog Owners

- 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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- **Deb Thompson, Cary, NC Dog Park (SPECIAL THANKS for her work on the original document)**
- **Dog Body Language 101** Copyright 2005 Chris Puls www.DogScouts.org Reprinted with permission.

Unleash Me

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- Dogs need to be vaccinated and licensed.
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Thank you for your help and cooperation.
City of Sequim

