

The Benefits of Off-Leash Dog Parks, a Veterinarian's Perspective

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As a practicing small animal veterinarian and dog owner in Gig Harbor, I realize the need for an off-leash dog park as a benefit to the humans and dogs of our community. The benefits of a community off-leash dog park are numerous...

- Everyone knows that exercise contributes to overall level of fitness, physical and mental health. This is true with people as well as pets. On leash, most dogs are not able to get their excess energy out. A proper dog park needs to have enough acreage to provide room for dogs to run and not feel crowded. Obesity in our companion animals is one of the most frequently diagnosed conditions. Physical activity is essential for treating and preventing obesity.
- Behavioral problems are greatly diminished in association with how stimulated and exercised a dog is. Behaviorists will tell you that a 'bored dog is a bad dog'. Having a safe place to take your dogs to allow them to run and play off-leash, and relieve pent-up energy, is necessary for preventing boredom. Behavioral problems, such as destructive chewing, digging, and barking, as a result, will be greatly diminished in dogs that are exercised appropriately.
- Having a community off-leash dog park will help strengthen the human-animal bond- It is documented that the human-animal bond helps to lower blood-pressure and stave off depression. Being a pet owner and watching your dog running and playing either alone or with other dogs brings immeasurable pleasure and happiness. Getting outside and breathing fresh air on a regular basis with your pet, and bonding with other community dog owners, helps keep the people of the community healthy and happy, the dogs are better socialized and exercised....overall, it's a win-win situation for all.

Before you take your dog to the dog park, please make sure that your dog 'plays nice' with other dogs and people. If your dog is overly dominant or aggressive towards people or other dogs, please do not visit the dog park. You must have verbal control of your dog while you are at the dog park, and carry a leash with you in case an altercation occurs.

Have your pet current on vaccinations including DHPP (distemper, hepatitis, parvovirus, parainfluenza), Rabies and Bordetella (kennel cough). If you frequent outdoor dog parks regularly, you should consider asking your veterinarian for a prescription for a monthly, preventative intestinal parasite medication such as Heartgard Plus, Sentinel or Revolution. Wait to take puppies to a dog park until they have completed their puppy vaccination series (usually at 16 weeks of age)- they are more susceptible to infectious disease due to their developing immune system.