

## Manners at the Dog Park

We are fortunate to have several off leash parks available in Abbotsford where we can let our dogs free to run, play and socialize. To find the location of these parks, and others throughout B.C., check out <http://www.pets.ca/dogparks/bc.htm>. Please remember, along with the privilege of having dog parks comes a responsibility. Just what does it mean to have good dog park manners?

- Your dog should be under control at all times. A dog park should not be your first choice just because you can't walk your dog on leash. All dogs should be trained and preferably have gone to training classes. And the most important command they need to know is the recall. They should come when called.

The recall can be extremely difficult in a dog park situation. There are many distractions and often other dogs that just seem more exciting to your pet than you are! The minute you arrive at the dog park is when you need to establish control. Don't let them just charge out of the car and into the field. Work with them for two or three minutes running them through a few commands before releasing them. And repeat this every now and then throughout their play time at the park. But please respect others and don't tell them how to train their dog unless asked!

- Make sure your dog is socialized. The dog park is not the place to get your dog socialized. They should be socialized before they arrive. If this area is a challenge, work with a trainer first. The dog park is a great place to keep your dog socialized and to work further on socializing but it is not the place for aggressive or overly timid dogs.

Don't leash your dog at the dog park. It increases tension and is more likely to lead to aggression when unleashed dogs approach your dog. Do stay with your dog and make sure they know you are in command. If you are in control the aggression will be minimized. Listen to your dog, watch the emotions, and be prepared to leave if things get tense.

- Scoop the poop. The dog park is for everyone. Keep it clean. Bring extra bags because exercise can stimulate bowel movements. One bag may not be enough. Make sure your dog is on a parasite control program. Three summers ago we sent staff to the dog parks to collect stool samples. It turned out that 70% of the samples had some sort of parasite. That number is much higher than what we see in the stool samples we run in hospital. This leads me to suspect that those individuals not kind enough to scoop the poop are not responsible enough to control parasites in their dogs. In turn, this is creating a hazard for the rest of us. If you can stomach it, scoop some extra poop left behind by those inconsiderate individuals.
- Do your part to control disease transmission. Make sure your pet is vaccinated and that those vaccines are current. Do not take unvaccinated dogs to the dog park. Do not take sick pets to the dog park.
- Don't bring 'in heat' dogs to the dog park. This doesn't need much explanation! Just imagine the problems this brings to dog interactions.
- Don't bring toys to the dog park. Fights can start over toys.
- And finally, if your pet injures another pet, step up to the plate and take responsibility. Give the owner your name and number and pay for the vet bill.