

## AVOIDING DOG FIGHTS IN THE POOCH PLAYGROUND

Dog fights are uncommon in a dog park because the dogs are on **neutral territory** and are **unleashed** so they can run away from danger.

**However, dogs will be dogs; so dog fights can occur, anywhere, anytime. Remember, you are using the park at your own risk.**

Hopefully, you started socializing your dog when he/she was just a puppy. Even if you didn't or you are not sure how your dog will react, you can still enjoy the park with your dog by following these steps:

**Make your first few visits to the park at a time when it is not busy.**

Expect your dog to be a little nervous at first. If the park looks too busy, leave and come back another time.

**Keep moving.** If you stay in one place, your dog may think he/she has to defend your territory.

**Avoid crowds.** The more dogs that are playing together, the more likely a fight will occur.

**Don't stay too long.** Dogs are like kids who get cranky when they are tired.

**Even if your dog is playing well with other dogs, intervene every minute or two and then let the dogs resume play.** This keeps the play from becoming too intense and escalating into a fight.

**Watch your dog.** Watch his/her body language. A slow wag of the tail, upright stance, ears forward, low growling or snarling, and staring face-to-face with another dog may be warnings signs of an imminent fight. If you see any warning signs, distract your dog and move away.

**Watch out for toy possessiveness.** If your dog gets too possessive with the ball, frisbee, rope, or stick, stop playing with it and move away from other dogs who are playing with toys. (Many dogs play well together with toys. They love to steal them from one another to encourage being chased. You just have to know and watch your dog.)

**Use a muzzle.** If you think your dog might be dog-aggressive, buy a good muzzle and use it when you come to the park. It is not cruel, and it will allow your dog get some good exercise running off leash. You'll still have to closely watch your dog because he may be giving off aggressive signals to other dogs. (You should be watching your dog anyway!)

## IF A FIGHT BREAKS OUT

**There is no completely safe way of breaking up a dog fight!** The two dogs are so completely focused on one another that they will bite anything or anyone that gets in their way. Your sweet little pooch doesn't even recognize you.

Keep your cool. Get another person to help you.

Don't yell at the dogs. They won't hear you.

**Don't try to grab your dog's collar. The other dog is aiming its teeth at the same area. This is the main reason for dog bites in a park!**

Grab the back feet of one of the dogs, pick up the feet and pull the dog away like a wheelbarrow. The second person should be doing the same thing with the other dog. Keep moving until the dogs are separated and no longer facing one another.

Keep the dogs apart. If you let them go, the dog fight may begin again.

**Check your dog for injuries** and find out about the condition of the other dog. Remember, the other owner is just as upset as you are. It is a good time to exchange names and phone numbers but not any other words that you might later regret. If you can, please fill out an incident report.

**It's time to put your dog in the car and go home. Do not keep your dog in the park after he has been in a serious fight.** Your dog needs time to settle down and this may take one or more days.

If your dog is not involved in the fight, keep her away. Don't let her join into the fray.

If you are not comfortable trying to drag the dogs apart, don't. You can be hurt much more severely than the dogs.

Other possible ways to separate fighting dogs:

**Throw a jacket over the dogs** to confuse them and maybe allow you the chance to separate them.

**Use your leash** (You should have it draped around your neck) to loop around your dog's hind quarters and draw it tight. Slowly back away and turn your dog away from the other dog. The other person should be doing the same thing with the second dog.

Sometimes you can separate dogs by **throwing water** on them, but you probably won't have enough with you while you are wandering around the park.

Some people swear by **citronella, pepper spray** or **airhorns** to break up fights. If you've got them, use them in a serious fight.