



Friends of
Canandaigua Canine Campus

SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING AN OFF-LEASH DOG PARK

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers for Dog Owners

Prepared by Friends of Canandaigua Canine Campus

Dog Park Advisory Committee

The mission of Friends of Canandaigua Canine Campus (CCC) is to help establish and support a membership dog park in the City of Canandaigua where dogs may safely play and exercise off-leash.

CCC, a volunteer group formed in 2013 and comprised of local dog owners and canine professionals, assists the City by providing in-kind resources and services, well-researched input into the dog park design and operation, fundraising for park construction costs and advocating for responsible dog ownership and education.

While Canandaigua Canine Campus is a city-owned, managed and maintained dog park, our group is wholly invested in its success. We have advocated passionately for a safe and healthy off-leash park for several years. Now that the dog park is built and ready to use, we created this handout to help dog owners positively, and safely, navigate the dog park experience.

To learn more about Friends of Canandaigua Canine Campus and dog parks, visit canandaiguacaninecampus.com.

Questions or comments may be sent to canandaiguacaninecampus@gmail.com

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A DOG PARK?

Dog parks benefit people, their dogs, and communities. A pleasurable dog park outing strengthens bonds between owners and their pets but also encourages human connections establishing camaraderie between pet lovers of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds. When residents and neighbors feel connected, it makes the community, as a whole, a better place to live, work and play. Dogs that experience sufficient off-leash exercise and socialization opportunities are happier, healthier canine citizens outside the dog park, too.

WHAT IS A MEMBERSHIP DOG PARK?

Membership parks are a widely-accepted standard dog park model: only registered dogs and their owners are permitted to use the space, which significantly reduces health and safety risks. Registering licensed dogs requires proof of rabies vaccination, plus a complete understanding of the park rules and an owner's assurance of the dog's general good health and social skills. At point of registration, this handout provides an opportunity to educate dog owners about dog parks. If conflicts arise occasionally that cannot be resolved on site by the owners, the city can address these by communicating directly with registered dog park users.

Registration also requires paying a modest membership fee to help fund park operations and eliminates objections from some residents that a dog park should not be supported by taxpayer dollars. Of course dog owners are taxpayers, too, very willing to support a dog park but this mechanism eliminates that objection from those who are not.

IS IT TRUE THAT DOG PARKS ARE NOISY AND THINGS CAN GET OUT OF CONTROL?

Just one incident at a dog park can generate negative press but, on the whole, they are generally peaceful—especially membership parks which attract responsible dog owners invested in the health and safety of their pups. Happy, well-exercised dogs tend not to bark when they play (they chase, sniff and wrestle but rarely communicate by barking) while frustrated, bored, territorial dogs do bark. Dogs with consistent opportunities to exercise and interact off-leash are usually better canine citizens in and outside of a dog park.

CAN ANY TYPE OF DOG USE A DOG PARK?

Dog parks are great for many dogs but not all. Frail or elderly, young puppies, aggressive “bullies”, fearful or excessively shy canines are not good candidates for group play. And while a completely fenced in play yard adds a safety net, all dogs using a dog park should be socialized, well-trained and under voice control (for example, come to the owner when called). This makes the experience safe and enjoyable for everyone. If your dog has never played off-leash in a group, please test this out before registering for the dog park. Many boarding facilities offer supervised group play sessions or “doggie day care.” You can also arrange a dog play date with other dog owners in a fenced-in yard to observe how your dog reacts to other dogs and playing styles.

WHAT ABOUT SPECIAL NEEDS PUPS, INTACT (NOT SPAYED OR NEUTERED) DOGS OR BREED RESTRICTIONS?

Everyone uses the dog park at their own risk. If you have a healthy and socialized special needs dog, it is your decision whether or not to register your dog. Though there are different schools of thought regarding spaying and neutering and behavior impact, we recommend spaying or neutering your dog. Intact males have the highest risk of inter-dog aggression and unsprayed females may not use the park at all when they are in heat. Last, there are no breed restrictions: all registered dogs must be socialized and voice or hand signal command trained. If your dog does not mingle well with other pups, the space can be rented for private play dates.

WHY IS THE RABIES VACCINE THE ONLY VACCINE REQUIRED FOR DOG PARK REGISTRATION?

Vaccinating your dog for rabies is the law. The city requires proof of this vaccination for a dog license and dog park registration. To lessen the chance of spreading disease, we recommend discussing non-core vaccinations with your veterinarian such as Bordetella (kennel cough), DHPP (distemper, hepatitis, parainfluenza, parvo), Leptospirosis and Canine Influenza plus flea, tick, heartworm prevention medication and annual fecal testing. Some intestinal parasites can easily get in the environment and spread from dog to dog as well as have a zoonotic (human) potential.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED APPROPRIATE PLAY IN A DOG PARK?

There are many playing styles but fun and excitement can quickly deteriorate if you are not paying attention to behavior shifts. Please keep a watchful eye on your dog at all times! Typically, dogs wrestle, mouth one another, bow, growl, chase and “butt swing.” Inappropriate interactions include more than one dog bullying another dog (cornering or crowding one dog as a pack), chasing without letting the other dog rest and forceful body slamming. While some dog owners want their dog “to work it out,” others are more protective. Owners also need “to work it out” respectfully if their dogs aren’t compatible. Dogs will “correct” another dog with a growl or nip without incident but sometimes this escalates. If your dog is being a bully or being bullied, call your dog out of the situation for a break, go to another part of the park or leave.

HOW CAN I READ CANINE BODY LANGUAGE AND ANTICIPATE TROUBLE? WHAT IF A SCUFFLE OR A FIGHT BREAKS OUT?

Mounting, jumping on or putting a paw on another dog, prolonged sniffing and circling, a stiff or frozen stance, forward-leaning posture or ears, slow tail wagging or raised hair along a dog’s back may lead to problems. The best way to deal with fighting is to prevent it in the first place: owners must be aware and watchful for signs (growling, very tense posture, “whale eyes,” teeth showing, snapping, snarling, lunging). Practice recalls and give your dog regular breaks to keep the energy level in a good spot. If a fight breaks out, don’t physically intervene but try to call your dog out of it. Don’t yell, it will add to the dogs’ tension and arousal. A loud noise (a hand clap, whistle or air horn) may startle the dogs just long enough for owners to separate dogs. Some people carry sticks to block unwanted behavior without physically touching a dog. In the event of a violent episode, call 911 immediately.

WHY DO YOU HAVE AN AGE RESTRICTION FOR CHILDREN?

While children over 10 can accompany an adult (18 or older) to the park, we don’t recommend it. *This is not a children’s playground!* A youngster breaking into a run may incite a dog to chase, or they may be knocked down by playful dogs. Some dogs are startled by sudden movements or noise, and a child may tease or approach a dog in a manner that is threatening without realizing it. Most concerning is a child leaning his or her face eye-level with a dog’s face. Direct eye contact from a stranger is intimidating, and even a well-mannered canine may bite. The best way to approach a strange dog is from the side, avert eye contact and offer the back of your hand for the dog to sniff. It is always best to ask an owner’s permission to interact with their dog first.

LAST LICKS...!

Even with safety precautions and rules, you assume risk when you and your dog enter a dog park. Despite this, dog parks are the fastest-growing urban park category nationwide and a source of enjoyment and connection for many dog owners. Have fun with your pup!



For more information about Canandaigua Canine Campus or other City Parks, contact Heather Krebs, Recreation Supervisor, (585) 396-5080 or hnk@CanandaiguaNewYork.gov