CADP Dog Behavior Guidelines

Being alert and responsive to your dog can help ensure the park is a safe and comfortable environment for all. Please review our guidelines for dog park etiquette, managing common triggers, and what to do in the event of an altercation.

# Basic etiquette

* Be attentive to your dog at all times. Dogs have personality differences, triggers, and off days, it is your responsibility to recognize and respond to your dog’s signs of discomfort, anxiety, or aggression, whether or not your dog is the instigator in an incident.
* Communication is key: if you notice the presence of a trigger, or signs that your dog is becoming anxious or overwhelmed, communicate that to other members present so that they can also take steps to intervene before escalation occurs.
* The gate is often an area of conflict as overcrowding can be overwhelming for a dog entering the park. Call your dog away from the gate whenever someone is trying to enter. If you are entering and dogs are crowding the gate it is appropriate to request other members to call their dogs away before entering.
* Different dogs have different triggers. Common sources of anxiety or reactivity include:
	+ High value toys: if your dog is becoming possessive or defensive over a toy it is be necessary to put that toy away
	+ Overcrowding: sometimes the addition of a third (or more) dog to a play session can heighten the anxiety or become overstimulating. If you notice that your dog is contributing to this, call him away. Or if you notice your dog is becoming overstimulated or anxious, call him away until things settle down. You can also communicate this to the other dog owner so they can help diffuse the situation.
	+ Invasion of personal space: some dogs want to be left alone to do their own thing. Particularly if there is a size or energy discrepancy, the intrusion of another dog into their space, particularly one who is ignoring their warnings to back off, may trigger an altercation. If your dog is sensitive to personal space, let other members know if you’d like them to call their dogs away. Or if you notice your dog is persistent in his attempts to engage another dog and you are unsure whether the other dog is interested in play, check with the other owner whether their dog is okay with this, or whether you should intervene.
* Food is not allowed in the dog park.
* Children under the age of 16 must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian to enter the park. Before bringing your child into the park please check with all other members present whether their dogs are comfortable around children. Many of our dogs are rescues, some with difficult histories. First and foremost the park is intended for dogs, please be respectful if another member notifies you that their dog can be reactive around children. If the other member is not ready to leave it is your responsibility to return to the park at another time. Additionally, if you bring your children into the park it is understood that they should be comfortable with how to act around dogs. (i.e. no running, yelling, climbing trees, or other unpredictable behavior because those behaviors can trigger reactivity in dogs) Agility equipment is for dog use only, and should not be used by children.

# Behaviors to be alert for

* **Signs of stress or anxiety**: ears to the side, tail low or tucked, trying to look small and hunched back, backing away or trying to hide from other dogs
* **Signs to “back off”**: stiff body, raised tail, baring teeth, snapping, snarling, raised hackles.
* **Signs of unequal interactions**: repeated body slamming, pinning, persistent mounting

If you notice any of these signs call your dog away to a neutral location where he can calm down, and communicate to the other dog owner if necessary that the interaction may be stressful for your dog.

Note that even if your dog is not displaying these signs, it is helpful to have your dog “take a break” as well as to practice recall on occasion during normal play. Call your dog to you, have them sit, look at you, calm down, or follow you to get some water. Especially if your dog enjoys physical play this helps ensure the intensity does not get too high, and reinforces your recall. Being proactive (rather than reactive) in this way reduces the likelihood of escalation to overstimulation, or to an incident in which your dog is no longer in your control. After a break, you can allow him to resume play. See below for a summary of some signs of good play:

* **Signs of positive play**: “shaking it off” (like after going for a swim—this is a sign of “resetting” after a bout of excitement or stress); loose, wide body language; play bows; and alternating who is on their side or back

# In the event of an altercation

* Remain calm. If your dog is not directly involved in the event, please call them away or retrieve them and take them away from the area.
* If your dog is involved in event, use whatever means are available to distract them away from the other dog. This can be a loud noise, spraying with the hose, or inserting a physical barrier such as a chair between the dogs. If you are trying to physically separate your dog, it is safest to do so by grabbing his/her hind legs and pulling backwards like a wheelbarrow. Reaching for a collar puts you at greater risk of being inadvertently bitten.
* Once separated, take your dog to a quiet corner of the park until they are calm. If you are able, have a conversation with the other dog owner to make sure all parties are alright, and to try to achieve a mutually agreeable resolution. (i.e. discuss if there was an identified trigger of the event, what actions could be taken in the future to avoid such an event, share information if there may be a need for follow up if the injuries are significant). If the nature of your dog’s injuries or the reactivity or anxiety level of your dog prevents you from resolving the issue on site, exchange basic contact info so you can follow up at a later time.
* If there is a clear “instigator” of the event, that dog should leave the park and return at a later time. Often there may not be a single instigator (i.e. one dog may have reacted after her “warning signs” were repeatedly ignored by the other dog; or both dogs may have reacted over a toy), in this case if parties cannot come to a mutual agreement, both dogs should leave the park and follow up outside the park or with the assistance of the CADP Board.
* Whether or not you were able to resolve the incident satisfactorily we ask that you file an incident report through the CADP website. This allows the Board to track incidents to better identify ways to promote safety at the park, and to close the loop with both parties to ensure concerns are addressed. After you file an incident report a Board member will reach out to you within 48 hours. If you were unable to reach successful resolution the Board will follow up with both parties, and close the loop with both parties once determining what actions will be taken.