



General information

Not all dogs are social and enjoy playing. Some dogs only like to play with trusted dogs that they have built up a relationship with, other dogs are comfortable playing with strangers.

Dog parks and other off lead areas

Unfortunately, most dogs that go to dog parks do not enjoy the experience. Many dogs will chase and bully other dogs without owner intervention. This can be detrimental to the dog being chased because they learn through experience that other dogs are scary. It also impacts the behaviour of the bully, the dog learns that being rough with other dogs is how to interact.

A fearful dog at a dog park that is doing their best to survive and stay safe will be forced to escalate their behaviour when avoidance and low level signs of fear are ignored by their owner and other dogs. A fearful dog can begin to show behaviours that we label as aggressive such as growling, snapping and biting other dogs in an effort to keep themselves safe.

Many people believe dogs can sort it out for themselves. This generally does not work and results in bad experiences for the dogs involved. A dog that is forced to fight with another dog will learn to do this to stay safe. It is far better for you, as your dog's guardian, to learn how to keep your dog safe and teach them how to defer to you when they are feeling fearful, anxious or stressed.

Many dog owners at dog parks do not closely monitor their dog. Many people do not understand dog behaviour and do not step in to help their dog.

Your dog's perception of safety is paramount. Just because you do not think they are in danger does not mean the dog feels that way.

If you would like to use dog parks and other off leash areas here are some tips for your visit:





- ❖ Pay attention to your dog's play style, interrupt any play interactions to help your dog to calm down.
- ❖ Remove your dog if they appear fearful, anxious or stressed.
- ❖ Remove your dog if they are bullying others
- ❖ Do not take your dog's toys to the park (this will avoid resource guarding issues)

There are safer ways to socialise your dog without it becoming detrimental to their mental health and wellbeing such as training classes or seeking help from a trainer.

Understanding your dog's body language

Loose wiggly body, open mouth, soft eyes when seeing another dog

This is a dog that is feeling comfortable and confident to meet another dog. However dogs meeting on lead needs to be managed carefully.

Look at the other dog, use your discretion, is the other dog comfortable or showing signs of fear.

Do not allow your friendly dog to approach a dog if the other dog looks tense or is staring and has stopped moving or if the other dog is barking, lunging or growling. Your confident dog may scare the other dog and make them more fearful.

If you are going to approach another dog with your dog, only allow them to have close physical contact for a few seconds and then call them away from each other and back to their handler.

Tense, stops moving, staring, closed mouth and very still when seeing another dog

Tensing up, staring, closed mouth and remaining very still is usually the first sign a dog is uncomfortable with another dog in their environment. When dogs are showing this level of discomfort please remove them from the situation. You may need to turn around and walk away from the other dog or cross the road. Do not let them meet as you risk either dog causing injury.





Cowering, rolling over, lip licking when seeing another dog

Cowering, rolling over and lip licking are signs your dog is feeling overwhelmed and is fearful and unsure of how to interact with the other dog in their environment. Do not allow the other dog to stand over your dog and sniff. Rather encourage your dog to move away from the other dog by calling their name and reinforcing this when they come to you.

Barking, lunging, growling and pulling to the another dog

Many dogs feel uncomfortable meeting another dog on lead. When a dog is on lead they feel they cannot escape the situation. When they feel they cannot escape they will escalate their behaviour. When your dog sees another dog and they are on lead they may begin barking, lunging and pulling to the other dog. If this happens it is important to stay calm. Do not escalate your behaviour by shouting, jerking on the lead or attempting to stop your dog reacting. Your dog is using these behaviours to keep the other dog away from them because they are fearful. The best course of action is to move away from the other dog. You may need to turn around and walk back the way you came, cross the road and generally avoid the other dog.

Where to find more help and advice

RSPCA SA offers dog training classes and one on one training all over Adelaide. Go to our dog training page and register your interest. Our one on one trainers can help you manage your dog's behaviour with up to date scientifically effective methods.

<https://www.rspcasa.org.au/services/dog-services/dog-training/>

RSPCA SA have a list of qualified force free trainers all over Adelaide. They offer many different services such as group classes and in home consultations.

<https://www.rspcasa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/FF-Trainers-List-Update-Jan-2019.pdf>





This list also include a list of Veterinary Behaviourists that can help you with your pet's medical needs.

What to do if you can no longer care for your pet

If at any time during your pet's life you can no longer care for them, please return them to our care.

