

Daycares, Dog Parks.... Should I or shouldn't I?



In general, doggy daycares and dog parks can be risky places for your puppy or dog. As such, we don't generally recommend them.

Daycare or dog parks are not a necessary social experience for your dog. Taking your dog to these places is often either a shortcut to exercising your dog, or a way in which we think we might alleviate our guilt about our dogs being without us for long periods of time.

Your dog doesn't need a doggy daycare or a dog park to be a social, friendly dog.

Here are some of the reasons we do not support the consistent use of Daycares or Dog Parks.

- 1.) Often, loving folks who run a daycare, may not be qualified in, nor even consider, the use of positive & modern methods to oversee the play & behavior of the dogs. Many folks at both daycares and/or dog parks, do not know how to interpret their dog's 'body language', when to advocate for the safety of their dog, what is acceptable play, or how to gently interrupt inappropriate play. They may also misinterpret normal play, stepping in to correct your dog when it's not necessary, possibly doing so in a rough way. Often, folks at daycares or dog parks can pass uneducated opinions as to how you should train or correct your dog.
- 2.) Unfortunately, some daycare operators may not let you know exactly how they will correct your dog when they make a mistake while in their care. Some may use aversives you would never choose to use with your own dog, unbeknownst to you.
- 3.) You may find folks in the dog park who never interrupt inappropriate play that may be making your dog very uncomfortable. And you may also not know when your dog needs some help being more appropriate in play.
- 4.) Dog fights can often result when guardians are not attentive, nor knowledgeable, about a own dog's behavior in a Dog Park setting, or at a daycare. The experience of being 'attacked' or even overwhelmed by another dog, can leave your own dog injured and/or emotionally 'reactive', even offensively aggressive, when in those situations in the future.
- 5.) The experience your dog is having may or may not be positive if he is feeling unsure, worried, overwhelmed or fearful. Your dog may also demonstrate a lack of social skills, perhaps being a bully with other dogs. Left in a daycare setting for the day without you to advocate for them, or in a dog park where no one seems to be paying attention, dogs often have no way to opt out if they are struggling. Inexperienced or unknowledgeable folks may not even recognize that your dog is not having a great time, or that he is in fact practicing & learning inappropriate ways of interacting with other dogs that can lead to lifelong problems.



- 6.) There are often dogs at daycares or dog parks who are less than well-mannered and may have less than appropriate social behaviors. 'Monkey see, monkey do!' Your dog can quickly 'join in' and find that all this chaos is actually pretty fun - and reinforcing. Barking, jumping, excited play can become hard to change when your dog is at home now because he is practicing it and enjoying it so much at daycare or in the dog park.

- 7.) Arriving at daycares or dog parks can create over-arousal in your dog, which is now becoming a practiced & stronger behavior every time you go there, when we truly want our dogs to be neutral or emotionally regulated. There is more value in playing with other dogs, than there is in the relationship with you.



PAWS Handout - Dog Parks & Doggy Daycares - Yay or Nay?

8.) While at daycares or dog parks, your dog is likely over-excited, over-aroused, and could easily learn that there is far more fun playing with the dogs than being with you - or listening to you. The environment is what we call a 'university level' distraction. If you have not prepared your dog to have tons of value in giving his attention to YOU, and to have an 'reliable' recall, you can quickly find your dog simply ignores you now. Physically removing him from all the fun can mean he'll be even less likely to want to 'come' to you, and may even start to avoid coming close to you, since it means he has to leave. Sound familiar?

9.) Depending on the requirements for vaccinations (including Bordetella), many daycares and certainly dog parks may be places where your dogs health could be at risk if unvaccinated dogs are in the space (that's often the case).

What would we suggest for your dog's social life instead:

1.) First, become your dog's best friend and playmate.

Research supports that, for most dogs, strong social connections with their 'person' is as good as social connections with other dogs. Even better if the dog is shy, wary or fearful of other dogs, or is simply a 'loner'.

Building engagement with your dog, becoming his 'connection' to enrichment and activities structured by you to meet his 'doggy' needs, teaching 'tricks' and just playing, balanced with calm, relaxing downtime, can develop a strong social bond between you & your dog. You will likely find that your dog will begin to prefer time with you over all others, even other dogs. Find out what your dog truly loves to do, and be his 'rockstar' playmate!



Noah Snyder-Mackler, an associate professor at Arizona State University's school of life sciences. "Not all domestic dogs are necessarily better off or happier with other dogs." Still, according to the results of a study led by Snyder-Mackler, which was published last year, social companionship (both canine and human) has a major effect on a dog's health and life span. He also notes that humans can be just as good (and for some dogs, better) social partners for their pets — every animal is unique, and not all dogs enjoy the company of their peers.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/home/2024/04/25/do-dogs-need-friends/#>

2.) Set up 'playdates' with friends and family you know, whose dogs are reliable, stable, and socially appropriate dogs from whom your dog can learn, and with whom your dog will feel safe and comfy. Supervise play.

3.) If you are in a bind, or feel that your dog should have 'enrichment' or exercise throughout the day because he is alone, or it might work better with the reality of your schedule, we would suggest recruiting a friend or family member to help. Just like asking someone to sit with your kids, you can ask if they can 'come visit' with your dog. It is far more likely your friends and family will share your ethics in how your dog is treated and trained.

4.) If the opportunity exists, find a Certified Professional Dog Trainer (CPDT) who may be hosting playdates where puppy play will be carefully supervised, interrupted positively when necessary to either keep your puppy safe or teach appropriate social skills, where YOU can also learn and where YOU will see exactly how your puppy is being treated.

5.) If after considering this information, you still want to use a daycare, there are **many** questions you should ask, but please be sure to ask at least these few questions of anyone who will be responsible for your dog's care & well-being:

i.) How would you describe your training or teaching methods?

(even daycare providers will be 'supervising and redirecting your dog')

ii.) How will my dog be corrected if he does something wrong?

(*this one questions will tell you all you need to know, if you just let the person speak)

iii.) What equipment do you use for walking or leashing my dog? (slip leashes, prong collars, choke/pinch collars or pinch harnesses, ecollars, etc are all tools that operate by causing discomfort)

Early socializing with your puppy and continued social experiences for your adult dog are important. That does not however mean that you need take your puppy or dog to a daycare or to a dog park. There are many other options to raise a well socialized dog without taking these risks.