

Dog Park Safety

Green Lights and Red Flags



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Dynamics in a dog park constantly change. Even one dog coming or going can affect the entire atmosphere. Knowing dog body language can be the difference between fun and a fight.

Dogs exhibiting stressed or red flag behaviors need to leave the park. The longer they stay, the more likely an incident may occur. If you see worrisome behaviors, take your dog out. After a fight, all dogs involved must leave the park for the day.

If your dog is involved in a scuffle, do not punish him! He is already stressed and you will worsen the stress. The best things to do are to stay quiet, calm, reassuring and get your dog out of the park the moment you become concerned.

Green lights



Dogs exchanging roles during play

Dogs bouncing and play bowing with/without higher pitched vocalizations

Relaxed mouths (open and not tense)

Tail held relatively level with back and wagging combined with other relaxed signals (not all tail wagging is happy wagging)

Pawing the air (such as in “shake” tricks)

Lips covering teeth

Ears up

Signs of a stressed dog include

- Tail held low
- Mouth closed
- Nose licking
- Yawning when not tired
- Worried/furrowed brow
- Overly alert/hyper-vigilant
- Avoiding dogs or people
- Ears back
- Crouching down trying to look smaller
- Rolling over constantly
- Eyes wide
- Pacing
- Looking for an escape



Red Flags



- Excessive mounting (not always a show of dominance, it can also indicate stress)
- Pinning and standing over that dog
- Stiff body language
- Repeatedly chasing one dog without changing places in play
- Lifting lips/snarling
- Bullying, repeatedly harassing another dog and ignoring signals to back off.

- Guarding a toy, water bowl, human or another dog
- Staring intensely at another dog
- Hackles (hair along shoulders and back) raised
- Hovering at entrance and pouncing on dogs as they enter
- Repeatedly laying the head on another dog's back or shoulders
- Harassing leashed dogs when owners are trying to leave

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