

Your First Visit

My dog has never been in a dog park before. How can I expect my dog to react?

Reactions vary depending on the dog's nature, its living environment, and its age. For the first visit to a dog park, try to arrive at a time when there are not very many dogs in attendance. This will reduce the stress on the dog.

For dogs that are house-bound or who live in small fenced-in back yards, entering a large area like a dog park and being off-leash can be stressful even with no other dogs. They need time to adjust to the new-found freedom.

Walk your dog around the park on the outside of the fence. Let the dogs that are inside come over to the fence to sniff and greet to see how your pup reacts. If your dog sniffs back and appears friendly, it may be ready to join in the activities inside. If, instead, your dog barks and lunges violently at those inside the fence, it may need more socialization before it will be ready to enter the park.

When you do enter, be sure to remove your leash once you enter the first gate. You can then open the gate to let your pup run into the park. Do not keep your dog on a leash inside the off-leash area since that will put your dog at a disadvantage, the other dogs can run away, but yours can't, so your dog may react by being more aggressive. When a dog enters a dog park, the first thing you will notice is that a number of other dogs who are already inside the park will come running over to the fence to see who is arriving. This is the Greeting Committee. Dogs are curious creatures, actually they are downright nosy, and they will want to check out the newbie. Depending on your dog's nature, it will either be anxious to enter and play or it will be hesitant to get into a pack of unknown dogs. The "first time jitters" is just your dog being unsure of the new environment.

It usually takes about ten minutes for a new dog to become accustomed to the dog park environment. Initially, you may see the animal with its tail held in a defensive posture, curved down between its hind legs. It may lie down or try to get into a corner as the dogs inside the park all hover around and sniff the newcomer. The dogs already inside the park are being friendly but your dog doesn't know that yet. Pet your dog and give it comforting words as a way to reduce stress. Your dog may run away from and be followed or playfully chased by the Greeting Committee. Stay close by in case the dog wants to come over to you for protection. Once your dog realizes that there are no threats inside the park, you should see your dog's tail rise and eventually curve over its back to the "I am having a good time" position. By this time you will have already remarked that the dog looks like it is really enjoying the environment.

Once your dog makes friends and begins seeing the same dogs on a regular basis, you won't see the same Greeting Committee at the gate. You will instead see your dog's friends waiting anxiously to play and playtime will begin as soon as you open the gate. Dogs have different play styles. Some like to just walk around and do not interact with other dogs, some like to chase and run, while others like to wrestle. Your dog will quickly find other playmates that have similar play styles.

While your dog is adjusting to the new environment, be sure to introduce yourself to the other humans in the park. Explain that you and your dog are new and ask for any helpful hints to maximize your dog's (and your) enjoyment of the facility. Keep an eye on your dog so you can adhere to the number one rule of the Dog Park: **Scoop Your Poop!**

You may also wish to make your inaugural visit to the dog park a short one, perhaps only thirty minutes. Make sure you leave on a positive note. You will want to leave at a time when the dog is having fun, is not too tired, and really doesn't want to go. Your pup will look forward to the next visit very eagerly.

Just as with any park, there are rules. Bree's Bark Park operates on an honor system. Each person is responsible for the actions of his or her dog.