

Joey's Dog Park Code of Conduct

The Ultimate Dog Park Culture

In addition to the standards and requirements specified in our Dog Park Rules, we want to further describe the general standards of behavior that we believe are essential to creating the kind of culture in which all members will thrive.

One thing we know, from years of helping pets and their owners with nutrition, training, socialization issues etc., is that pet ownership is a very personal matter for everyone. We're embarrassed when our dogs behave badly, and so delightfully proud when they do well: we show our friends the tricks we taught them, or how calm they remain among guests or distractions.

What we Expect

1. Assess yourselves honestly while remaining objective and supportive toward the growth and development of your fellow dogs and members:
 1. It's important that all members remain open to introspection, and honest self-assessment, of their respective level of development in dog leadership.
 2. If you're struggling with something, talk to us! Ask for help, or seek out our trainers. It's amazing how easily most dog issues can be corrected or improved.
2. Remain objective and supportive toward the growth and development of your fellow members and their dogs:
 1. It's paramount that you refrain from condemnation, moral or personal judgments, or shaming of other members as they make their own respective journeys. We're all in this together.
 2. With that in mind, it's essential that you readily and actively communicate with your fellow members—from the beginning—about your needs and preferences. Be proactive!
 3. By the same token, we need every member to welcome open and honest feedback from their fellow members re: those needs and expectations.
3. Finally, we need all of our members to be fully open to criticism, evaluation, and—most importantly—direction and instruction from our staff and other qualified professionals whom we may enlist.
 1. Remember that we do all of this on your behalf: we empathize with the shame, embarrassment, and general emotional distress that can result from difficulties with your dog.
 2. We've all been there. And creating a world where more dog owners can experience: the amazing lightness, ease, and connection that true pack leadership and fellowship brings, is our highest goal, and our most rewarding success.

What to Watch For

It's important to look for all of these behaviors, and correct them accordingly. Again, we are not passing judgment, but we all must address these things proactively.

All of these behaviors occur on a spectrum, where the level of **excitement, tension, or anxiety** can greatly effect any interaction. **These are the worst elements that can be added to a group of dogs.** Generally, a 1) calm-submissive state is the best state a dog can be in: followed by 2) calm-dominant (without attempts to assert additional dominance over other dogs or claim territory or property), then 3) excited-submissive, and finally 4) excited-dominant.

Things can be fluid beyond number one, but you can almost be certain that a group of calm-submissive dogs will get along great. It's the **humans** that should be exerting and asserting the leadership and dominance amongst the group.

One of the most oft-repeated fallacies we hear is that a dog is "**unpredictable**", or did something "out of nowhere". **Dogs are never unpredictable; you just have to understand their language, and thus know what to look for.** It is our conviction that the vast majority of negative dog interactions can be prevented by catching these subtle (and not so subtle) indications of what's to come.

How to Handle It

With that said, here are some things to look for on both sides of the spectrum:

Dominance signals:

1. Forward or "puffed out" chest
2. Standing tense and tall with head held high, looking down from intense and wide-open eyes.
3. Ears held forward, high and tense (depending on breed and shape of ears).
4. A curled, or highly-raised, and tense tail. (Also somewhat breed dependent in terms of how it manifests.)
5. Too much eye contact, very little use of the nose. Fixating on other dogs. Crying or whining while staring at a dog that it can't reach while leashed, or behind a fence, etc.
6. Not allowing other dogs to smell them (this can also be from fear, but in this case it's usually done more defiantly).
7. Mounting or standing over top of another dog.
8. Taking toys out of their mouths or away from their general possession.
 1. This is one in particular that many owners think is "cute" or playful, when in fact it's anti-social and dominant behavior: often on the part of younger dogs that have yet to learn dog manners.
 2. **This is your responsibility even more than other dogs. Don't let other dogs teach your dog manners.**
9. Corraling, herding, chasing, or otherwise "bossy" behaviors: sometimes breed instinct can play a part in this, but it is still unacceptable.

10. Nuisance barking: unacceptable in any context, excessive barking can often be a dog's way of asserting control over an area, other dogs, or their owners and other humans.

Best Practices For Establishing Leadership

The best way to deal with dominant behavior is to prevent it from ever happening. If you're the leader, and you're dominating the interaction, your dog (and others) will naturally fall into a submissive role. All dogs naturally seek their place within the hierarchy, and it's your job to show them where your place is. The rest will take care of itself.

Warning: Do not attempt these tactics with dogs you don't know or that need serious rehabilitation):

1. Work on your own state-of-mind. Address any anxiety, tension, and passive or reactive tendencies you may harbor.
 1. Meditation and breathing exercises are highly recommended.
 2. Remain calm, patient, and persistent. Don't give up or give in to frustration.
 3. Remember that none of a pet's behavior is personal. Everything can be corrected, remolded, redirected, and rehabilitated.
2. Develop assertive posture and body language. Outside of your internal state-of-mind, your body language (which is, of course, related) is the most important factor in your ability to establish pack leadership.
3. Talk slower, lower, and far less often.
 1. Sound, especially high-pitched, only heightens excitement: making your task more difficult.
 2. Refrain from excessive verbal commands. Your body language and movement will be far more effective in controlling and leading your dog than sound. The effectiveness of verbal commands are a reflection of your leadership status with your dog: not how loudly or often they're spoken.
 3. An otherwise minor detail, but in particular: do not say the dog's name much while practicing, or in tense or chaotic settings, if at all. It's not necessary, and is often associated by the dog with excitement—as they hear it when people are excited.
4. Instead, use well placed physical touch, and gentle but clear, calm, determined, and assertive movements to communicate what's expected of your dog. As noted above: working on your breathing and state-of-mind will allow you to move quickly and calmly at the same time.

Submission signals

1. Curled or collapsed back, chest and/or overall body language.
2. Standing low or slouching with head low.
 1. Be careful with this interpretation of a low head, as it can also be a sign of stalking, prey-drive, or other otherwise intense or confrontational states of mind.

2. The key is the dog's overall intensity level, particularly in the eyes, and the dog's overall body language.
3. Avoidance of eye contact, and turning the head to its side.
 1. In the dog world, direct eye contact can often be interpreted as a challenge
 2. This is why humans can often provoke fearful or reactive behavior in dogs by following our own social conventions.
4. In a similar vein, dogs will often avoid standing directly facing each other, at least for long. Contrast this with a more dominant dog or pack leader, who has no reluctance to face a potential adversary head-on.
5. Tail tucked under and tense. (**Down and relaxed is great: that's calm submission.**)
6. Ears folded down or tucked flat against the head.
7. Head is pinned back toward the shoulders with an active nose. (It looks funny, and almost snobby in human body language terms, but it's generally very positive.)
8. Believe it or not, a smile: some dogs smile so big you'll see their teeth, and humans often mistake it for growling.

Best practices with submissive or fearful dogs

When combined with solid leadership skills that prevent and correct dominant behavior, these tweaks in your approach can greatly improve your results with submissive or otherwise fearful dogs.

Warning: Do not attempt these tactics with dogs you don't know or that need serious rehabilitation):

1. Give less eye contact
2. Approach more relaxed with a straight back, bending at the knees rather than the waist if you want to get on their level.
3. Give them your side or your back rather than coming at them head-on.
4. Do not reach to pet them from on high. Instead, relax your arms and let them come to you. There's no need to hold out your hands at all.