

TO LEASH OR NOT TO LEASH

When you have a young, high-energy dog or puppy, it sometimes seems that they can never get enough exercise. After a 30-minute walk around the block, they come home ready to play.

Dog parks and doggie day cares present a solution for some dog owners, but not all. Not all dogs are appropriate for the dog park or doggie day care (see articles *Is Your Dog a Dog Park Dog* and *Dog Parks* on the Articles page of our website). Recent studies have shown an increase in aggression exhibited by some dogs who regularly attend these group activities. If your dog is shy, fearful or does not actively participate in games at the dog park, these may not be good options for your dog.

Many owners find that a good game of long-distance fetch or frisbee in the park is enough to wear their dogs out. However, before you let your dog go leash-free, consider these consequences.

Leash Laws. The City of Sacramento imposes significant fines for free-roaming fidos; If you are caught with an off-leash dog, the fine could run you almost \$200 (check with your local animal control agency for the fines in your area). Add another \$103 if you don't clean up after your pooch!

Training. If your dog does not yet have a rock-solid recall and is easily distracted, allowing them to run off-leash could have a significant impact on their training. Each time your dog does not come to you when called, they learn that this command is optional, which will make it increasingly more difficult to build a reliable recall in the future.

Safety.

Needless to say, if your dog does not come when called, there are serious safety risks. An out of control off-leash dog is more likely to run into the street and be hit by a car, approach an un-friendly dog, chase and injure a cat or other animal, or run in the

path of a jogger or bicyclist. If your dog's actions cause even minor injury to a person or animal, your dog can be considered potentially dangerous and your local government can impose restrictions on you and your dog.

Impact on Other Owners. Each time a dog owner is caught with an untrained, off-leash dog, the perception of all dog owners as irresponsible and inconsiderate is perpetuated. This means more restrictions placed on responsible dog owners with well-trained dogs. Fewer parks and public places allow even well-behaved leashed dogs because of the actions of a few irresponsible owners.

Based on a recent poll by DogFriendly.com, the top reason for banning dogs from beaches altogether is the disregard for leash laws.

FINDING A SOLUTION

There are a lot of options available to owners of young dogs still in training. Physical activity is important, but is not the only way to wear out your high-energy pup.

Exercise the Senses. A 30-minute walk in a new neighborhood carries all kinds of new sights and smells for your dog which can really work those senses. Think of how tired you are after walking around a new city or even a new shopping mall. This is because you are using all of your senses even more than you do in familiar areas. With senses of smell, and hearing even more sensitive than ours, a change of scenery can really wear your dog out!



RESPONSIBLE OWNERSHIP

Play Dates. If your dog has a buddy he likes to wrestle with, schedule a play date. A good wrestling match in the backyard while you enjoy a glass of wine or a cool beer is a great way to spend an evening!

Work the Mind. Just like working the senses, working your dog's mind by teaching a new trick or perfecting known exercises around increasing levels of distraction can really give your dog a work-out.

BUT I HAVE TO

So, you've read this far, but you still believe it is absolutely necessary to let your dog off-leash and you are prepared to take responsibility for his actions. In that case, we offer the following suggestions:

Choose safe, secure areas. Don't let your dog off-leash in public parks which are surrounded by busy roads, joggers and other dogs. Find remote locations such as large, open fields (mind the No Trespassing signs). This may mean driving a ways to reach your destination, but you can let your dog safely stretch his legs without putting his safety, or the safety of others, at risk.

Be Vigilant.

If you are watching out for other people and other dogs,

you will see them before your dog does and will have a better chance of calling your dog back to you to leash him before he can be a nuisance. If you are in a remote area, keep an eye out for wildlife that may lead your dog on a long and dangerous chase.

If your dog does not yet have a rock-solid recall and is easily distracted, allowing them to run off-leash could have a significant impact on their training.



Be Considerate. Your pup may be the friendliest dog around, but that does not mean everyone appreciates being greeted by muddy paws, sloppy kisses or invasive noses!

Other Dogs. Allowing your dog to approach other dogs when on a walk

or in the park is a risky proposition. Not all dogs may be as friendly as yours. An on-leash dog is more defensive than one that is off-leash which can escape a threat. Your off-leash, out-of-control

pup could cause a serious problem and could get injured if he decides to greet an unfriendly dog.

Use Good Judgement. If you question whether or not you have chosen a good location to let Fido run free, it's probably

not a good idea and not worth the risk.

Finally, make sure your dog is licensed, vaccinated and is wearing all tags. That way, if your off-leash pup gets lost, you have a better chance of finding him.

CONCLUSION

Even with all of the fun activities we can do with our dogs such as agility, flyball, flying disc and obedience, there is nothing more enjoyable than watching our dogs running free and acting like....well, DOGS!

But before you unleash your dog, make sure that you are doing so when and where it is safe for your dog and is considerate of others or soon there won't be any public places where dogs are allowed - on or off-leash!

-Lisa Mullinax