

How to enhance your *dog park* experience

BY JENNIFER JACOBY-SMITH

Saskatoon residents are fortunate to have so many dog parks to choose from when it comes to enjoying some off-leash time with their four-legged buddy.

There are 11 dog parks in the City of Saskatoon. Each one boasts a different size and type of terrain. There's surely a park that will suit every type of dog.

The off-leash areas provide an opportunity for your canine to experience some fresh air, exercise, and fun. The naturalized spaces can be stimulating for dog – a chance to see and explore new territory and new smells.

But is your pooch ready for a trip to the dog park?

According to Kevin Sorokowski, a Dog Park Ambassador with the City of Saskatoon, part of being a responsible pet

owner is knowing if your dog is ready for the dog park.

Your dog should know how to come when called, along with other basic commands, and should know how to greet other dogs and their owners (without exhibiting aggressive behaviours).

Sorokowski says it's also important to judge your dog's mood from day to day.

"Be mindful of whether or not the dog's been having a good day," he says. "There are times when it isn't the best day to take them. If that's the case, don't take them. They'll be good the next day."

This is especially true if your dog is feeling unwell or out-of-sorts – if their routine has been messed up, for example.

Before going to a dog park, it's important to find one that suits your dog. If you own a

small dog, or a dog that is shy or not used to other canines, a smaller park might be a better choice. This will enable the owner to be in close proximity to their animal at all times. That way they can intervene should there be a doggy disagreement.

"Dogs being dogs, they don't listen to reason. They don't have discussions. They have immediate full-on arguments all the time. So it's crucial that people are near their dogs when they're visiting the parks, because that's the safest way to make sure nothing bad goes worse," says Sorokowski.

Small dog parks, such as the one in Caswell Hill, are only a half square block. It's a good place to visit with a small dog or a dog that the owner is worried about.

Knowing your own dog's likes and dislikes also helps. For example, Sorokowski



Chief Whitecap Dog Park is the 11th off-leash dog park to be introduced by the City of Saskatoon. With 80 acres to explore, Chief Whitecap Dog Park is the largest off-leash site in Saskatoon. PHOTO: FACEBOOK/CHIEF WHITECAP DOG PARK GROUP





There are 11 off-leash dog parks in Saskatoon, each offering a different user experience. It's a great opportunity for you and your dog to enjoy fresh air, exercise and fun. PHOTO: CITY OF SASKATOON

says his dog loves to roll in mud, so he chooses to take his dog to Fred Mendel Park because it's designed on a slope. This means water can't collect anywhere and create a tempting puddle.

Avalon is a large park with some trees and hills. At times your dog may not be in your direct line of sight. This park is good for easy-going dogs that return to their owner or like to be close to their owner.

"It's really important for people to pay attention to what their dogs are doing" Sorokowski says.

On hot days it might be a good idea to bring water if you plan on spending a lot of time at the park, or if there isn't a lot of shelter. You don't want Fido to overheat.

Bringing along some special treats may entice a reluctant dog to leave when it's time to go home.

But bringing toys? Not such a great idea, says Sorokowski. "Like my dog, if there's someone at the park throwing a ball for their dog, my dog could care less. But if another dog likes to chase balls, then you could have a problem."

If you do take a toy to the park, be prepared to not get the toy back. Another dog might claim it and attempts to get it back might create a problem.

Poop bags are great to take, but the City of Saskatoon does provide them for dog owners at each park.

"Poop bags and garbage cans are strategically located around the parks so you're always not far from a bag or a bucket," explains Sorokowski.

He emphasizes that it is the responsibility of the pet owner to pick up their dog's feces. "Nobody else should have to deal with your

dog's poop."

It keeps the park clean and enjoyable for everyone.

Sorokowski has another caution for dog owners no matter what park you visit: Don't linger at the gate. The gate to the park serves as an entrance and an exit. Dogs arriving are excited to be there and dogs leaving are excited from running around. This transition area might be a trigger point for your dog or another dog, so it's a good idea to move quickly away from the gate when you arrive and when you leave.

To make the most of your dog park experience, it's best to be prepared. Know your dog. Know the park. And most of all, have fun!

For more details on the City's dog parks, users are encouraged to visit www.saskatoon.ca/dogparks.

PLAY NICE!

Dog parks are a great place for socialization and exercise. Ensure you and your dog are ready for the off-leash experience. Your dog should know and obey basic commands of come, sit and stay before visiting a dog park. Consider taking obedience classes or hiring a qualified dog trainer.

