



## FAQ - The Environment of Off-Leash Dog Play

### 1. My dog isn't aggressive. Why can't he participate in off-leash play?

While an aggressive dog is a definite red flag for off-leash play, many dog owners are surprised to learn there are other red flag behaviors and responses that would indicate a dog might not enjoy off-leash play. The off-leash play environment is not a good fit for dogs for several reasons. Some examples include:

- Shy or timid dogs
- Fearful dogs
- Dogs that bully others
- Dogs lacking polite dog social skills
- Dogs that tolerate versus enjoy time with other dogs in playgroups

### 2. Don't all dogs love to play with other dogs?

This is a common myth that is shared as the popularity of dog daycare and dog parks has increased. The fact is many dogs do not enjoy playing with other dogs. A dog's life experiences, breed-type tendencies and social history all contribute to the activities that each individual dog enjoys. This does not mean anything is wrong with the dog, it just means he doesn't want to play with other dogs.

### 3. How do I know if my dog will enjoy off-leash dog play?

Consider your dog's past experiences being around dogs they do not know. Did your dog show interest and try to engage in meeting new dogs? If yes, he may be a good candidate. If no, he might prefer another activity. However, input from an experienced pet professional can help you make this decision for you and your dog. A formal dog evaluation session for off-leash play by a professional pet care provider provides great insight into a dog's behavior and fit for the environment of off-leash dog play.

### 4. Why does my pet care center require a dog evaluation test prior to admittance?

As mentioned in question two, not all dogs enjoy off-leash play. Pet care centers focused on safety of all dogs that participate in off-leash play have a formal screening process. This will include providing background and behavior information on your dog plus an evaluation meeting. The goal of the evaluation is to ensure each dog is right for the environment as we described in question one. Pet centers that require the evaluation place a priority on safety and ensuring all dogs enjoy their play sessions. In fact, we recommend you only consider allowing your dog to play off-leash in a center that requires a formal evaluation screening of all dogs.

### 5. Why does my dog play well with my friend and family's dogs, but was turned down for dog daycare at my pet center?

Your dog may enjoy playing with dogs they know, especially if they are used to playing in their own familiar environment. Your dog and his friends are comfortable with their own style of play and familiar environment. Many dogs play well with a few dog buddies or in very small groups of dogs, but that comfort does not automatically translate to large dog playgroups or new locations. Off-leash play in professional pet care centers can involve

very large groups of dogs and high activity levels. The environmental change is like the difference between your visit to a small county fair versus Disneyland; the level of activity intensifies significantly.

**6. My dog plays at the dog park so why did the pet center tell me he wasn't accepted into daycare?**

Unfortunately we find a lot of play behaviors that are practiced in dog parks are not ones that would be considered safe in a well-run off-leash playgroup. Typically dog owners have not had the benefit of professional training in dog body language and appropriate play behaviors. At professional pet care centers, dog playgroups operate with specific boundaries and limits to provide maximum safety for all the dogs.

**7. Why did my dog do fine at one pet care center but was turned down at another?**

Sometimes dogs will respond differently in similar environments. There are many variables to each off-leash play environment. Additionally, there is a wide range of safety practices adopted by pet care centers that provide off-leash play. The physical space, mix of dogs and staff leadership all contribute to the style of dog playgroups in each pet center. Typically centers that focus on safety will ensure every dog is evaluated to be sure they will enjoy the unique play environment offered. Each pet center knows their environment, group of dogs and play dynamics. They want all dogs that attend their groups to enjoy and not just tolerate the environment so they will turn down dogs that do not enjoy their off-leash playgroups.

**8. My dog is having problems at the dog park and my friends say I need to socialize him at a daycare. Will that help?**

Dog daycares in most pet care centers are designed for dogs that currently enjoy off-leash play. Just attending off-leash play is not the way to socialize a dog. This can actually backfire and make the dog even more nervous around other dogs. A better solution for your pet is to find a professional dog trainer who can help your dog be more comfortable in the presence of other dogs. You want to find a professional that has a background in dog behavior modification and an understanding of group dog play.

**9. My dog was turned down for off-leash play, so how do I fix his socialization problem?**

As discussed in the response to question 7 there are some professionals that specialize in dog-to-dog socialization and behavior modification. Alternatively, your dog may have nothing that requires "fixing". Attending off-leash playgroups is not a necessity in life for the average pet dog to be happy. If you can manage your dog safely on walks and in your neighborhood around other dogs we suggest you consider another type of social activity for your dog. Not all dogs enjoy or want to attend playgroups so find another type of activity that both of you do enjoy.

**10. What did we do wrong with my dog that they were turned down for dog daycare at my pet center?**

In almost every case dog owners have not done anything wrong when a dog is turned down for daycare. Your dog just doesn't enjoy playing off-leash with other dogs. The off-

leash play environment just isn't fun for your dog. In fact for many dogs off-leash play is not a fun environment.

**11. I think my dog was turned down for dog daycare at my pet center because of his breed, isn't breed discrimination wrong for pet care businesses?**

We do prefer that pet care centers evaluate each dog as an individual for off-leash dog play. However, from years of experience we have found that some breeds are a better fit to the environment than others. It is a fact that certain breed-type tendencies are not appropriate in social dog play. Off-leash play is a high activity environment so dogs that are quick to arouse often are not a good fit. Arousal and aggression are linked so for safety in play dogs must self-control their arousal. Your pet center operator has an obligation to create a safe environment for all the dogs that attend. They also know staff experience levels and their current dog groups so will accept dogs that fit well with both.

**12. What is the best way to socialize my new puppy?**

Enrolling in puppy training classes (for puppies under 5 months) that provide supervised puppy social play as part of the class is our preference. Professional trainers include tips on the wide range of socialization activities that puppies should experience as part of their classes. You may also find a professional pet care center that offers special puppy daycare sessions for puppies under 5 months. These sessions offer supervised play with other puppies in a similar age range. There are key stages of development that dogs progress through as puppies and life events during these stages do contribute to the activities they enjoy as adult dogs. For this reason we do not recommend dog parks or regular adult dog daycare for puppies younger than 5 months of age.

**13. My dog is young and very energetic, should I bring him to daycare every day?**

This is a question to discuss with your pet care center, but for most dogs attending daycare every day is not a good idea. Dogs need rest for good health and may not get that if they attend daycare daily. Discuss the best ratio of play and rest for your individual dog with your pet care center. Also be sure your dog is getting other forms of daily exercise like walks in your neighborhood. Dog daycare should not be their sole source of exercise.

**14. I just adopted a dog and don't know their background. How do I socialize them?**

Start with walks in your neighborhood and close observation of your dog's response to other dogs. It is important for a newly adopted dog to become comfortable with their new home and family first. Spend 2-3 weeks creating a routine for your new dog before you start socializing in a group environment. If your dog shows an interest in meeting dogs on your walk then consider enrolling your dog in playgroups at a professional pet care center. Their professional assessment process will provide good information on your dog's social behavior and provide a great environment for your dog to socialize.