

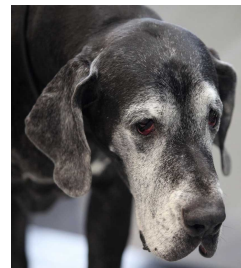
Are the Dogs Having Fun?



You want to offer the best care and service to every dog in your facility. You want all the dogs to enjoy off-leash playgroups. But how can you tell if the dogs really enjoy this type of exercise and how do you know when it's time to find another alternative for a particular dog?

Here are a few things to consider:

1) How old is the dog? Generally speaking, dogs over 5-6 years of age will have a shorter tolerance level for off-leash play with other dogs. This is true even if the dog grew up playing in dog parks and attending daycare. This doesn't mean that older dogs shouldn't go to off-leash playgroups, but it does mean that shorter periods of play may be more fun for the older dog.



2) Is the dog's body loose and relaxed? As each dog plays with other dogs, his body should remain loose, curvy and relaxed. If you see a lot of stiffening, straightened legs, tucked tails, bodies lowered to the ground, or frozen postures, this might mean the dog is nervous or overwhelmed.

3) Does the dog try to hide? If any dog seems to cower, tries to hide behind you, or attempts to crawl under a chair, bench or table, then he is probably not enjoying the interactions. This might mean he doesn't like off-leash play or perhaps it just means there is a bully on the playground that he wants to avoid. Either way, this dog isn't having fun and would probably like to leave.

4) Does the dog jump on people or the gate? When a dog is asking for help they will often panic and leap at the staff to get attention. I'm not just talking about dogs who have poor greeting behaviors and jump when they meet someone new. If you are watching a dog and he repeatedly jumps up at you, it might be his way of saying, "HELP!" If you ignore his pleas for help, some dogs will run to the gate and jump on the door to get out. If you see these signs, listen to the dog and take them out of the group.

5) Do the dogs take turns during play? Good play behavior consists of give and take. If a dog isn't taking turns, particularly if he is consistently pinned on the ground by another dog, he probably isn't having fun. Watch for breaks in the action from time to time.

6) Is the dog pacing or spinning? When a dog plays, does he interact with other dogs and enjoy romping around with them? Or does he choose to walk in the same pattern over and over? If any dog is engaging in any repetitive sequence of behavior (such as pacing or spinning), he may need a break.

Don't be fooled into thinking all dogs love to play with other dogs. Some dogs love off-leash play but others prefer a more quiet outdoor adventure. Take a close look at the dogs in your facility and honestly answer some of these questions to determine if off-leash play is the best activity each of them.

For your best resources on off-leash dog play, visit The Dog Gurus at www.thedoggurus.com and join Robin Bennett and Susan Briggs in making off-leash play a safe place for all dogs!