

Notes: Westgrove PACK General Meeting  
April 19, 2017

The meeting was called to order at 7:00PM. 26 people were in attendance.

Barry Spangler, Chair of the Westgrove PACK, opened the meeting with brief introductory remarks followed by an introduction to the evening's guest speaker, Michael Tomai, dog behavior expert and proprietor of Furry Face Training, LLC.

Mike provided general tips on how to read canine behavior and how to make the most of your experience at the dog park, including protecting your dog from unwanted advances and bullying. Mike likened dog parks to the bar scene in that both are places where antisocial behaviors ( humping, mobbing, bullying and fighting) can occur, and because some dogs may not be a good fit for dog parks just as some people are not a good fit for the bar scene. He discussed four major categories of body language and how to recognize them: 1) the dominant or bullying dog, 2) the overly submissive dog, 3) the overly fearful dog, and the 4) overly aroused dog.

Mike emphasized the importance to dog owners of watching your dog at all times during his stay at the park and of being on the look-out for potentially troublesome behaviors that are signaled by your own dog's body language or the body language of other dogs with which he is interacting.

If your dog does not appear to be reading social cues from other dogs (for example, if he is unaware that his behavior is offensive or frightening to other dogs), then you should remove your dog. Mike also suggests removing your dog if he is fearful since this fear will manifest in his body language (ears back, tail tucked, etc.) which may trigger dominant dogs into exhibiting bullying behavior . This, in turn, can lead to reactivity among other dogs and (at worst) result in your dog being mobbed by the pack. A bad dog park experience for a fearful dog (or any dog, for that matter) could lead it to fear other dogs in the future so it is best to introduce your dog to dog parks gently and at times of the day when it is not crowded.

Mike suggested not bringing your dog to the park if it is super amped and went further by saying that the park should not be the primary source of exercise for any dog. It is best to exercise your dog before bringing him to the dog park so that he is not over aroused by the time he gets there.

Mike discussed the need for an owner to intervene if he observes his dog engaging in "gratuitous behaviors" such as humping, so that the owner gives the dog a correction before the other dog(s) have a chance to "teach him a lesson." When one dog corrects another in a setting where there are many other dogs present – such as a dog park – mobbing can occur.

If you see your dog circling another dog menacingly, remove him immediately.

Your dog must be able to respond to a “come” command to be safe in the park. Make sure that the only time you use the command “come” is not when you are getting ready to leave the park lest the dog associate “come” with something he doesn’t like (leaving his friends). Make sure that you reward your dog when he comes to you (even if it’s just a chuck under the neck or a pat on the back). Use the park as a place for training as well as play so your dog knows the park is not a free-for-all and that he is expected to listen for your command at the park just as he does in other places.

Mike talked about the need to stop your dog from mobbing the gate since it is at entry points where fights are more likely to erupt. Go through the gate one at a time and avoid having more than one dog in the “air lock” (the space between the outer and inner gates at the park entrances).

Mike suggested not bringing a dog under 6 months of age to the park (even if he has had all of his shots before then). To avoid communicable diseases, he suggested not allowing your dog to drink from a communal water bowl by bringing your own bowl instead. He also emphasized the importance of not allowing your dog to eat another dog’s feces.

If a fight does break out at the park, make sure you have a water bottle ready so that you can spray the dogs. If all else fails, dump a bucket of water over them. This should startle them enough that they will stop fighting long enough for you to grab your dog and leave the park.

Last of all, Mike told us not to worry if your dog doesn’t like dog parks. Dog parks are not for every dog. If your dog doesn’t like the park, that doesn’t mean there is anything wrong with him!

After Mike’s discussion ended, Barry re-directed discussion to PACK business items. He told us the south end of the park will be opened on or around May 20 and that, when this end is opened, the north end will be closed for use for a period of 6-8 weeks during which time it will be aerated and seeded. (The water fountains will be available during this entire time so that owners (but not their dogs) can go to the north end to fill buckets and water bottles.

The Spring Fling will be held on May 20, from 11:00AM to 3:00PM. There will be food, and a raffle.

Jeff Pandin provided a Treasurer’s report. Details are available on this website under “financial reports.”

The last topic discussed was drainage. Barry provided an overview of some of the options the Board is considering to address water retention issues in the north end. Once the PACK has coordinated plans with FCPA and worked out the details of our strategy, we will provide further details to PACK caretakers.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30.